By Way of the Wilderness



Drawn by Charlotte Harding.

WAYNE AND ENID.

"Now can't I have a keepsake?" he said.

(*See page* 97.)



page 97.)

BY WAY *of The* WILDERNESS

By "*PANSY*" (MRS. G. R. ALDEN)
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By Way of the Wilderness

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I.

Revelations.

IT was in the dawn of a winter morning that Wayne Pierson was awakened by a kiss softly laid upon his forehead. He opened his eyes to see his father, dressed in a new gray suit, valise in hand, bending over him.

"Why, father, are you going away?" Wayne asked, wide awake in an instant.

"Oh, I didn't mean to waken you, my boy, but I wanted to give you a good-by kiss. I am going on a little journey that I have no time to tell you about. Aunt Crete will explain. I trust you, Wayne, to be a good brave boy, and believe that your father thinks he is acting for the best good of all concerned, however it may seem to you. Good-by."

The father stooped and kissed his boy again, while Wayne clasped both arms about his neck and held him close.

The boy lay still for a few minutes after his father had left him, thinking over those words about trusting him. Of course, he would always believe that his father did just right.

"Perhaps," he said to himself, "father thought I acted vexed yesterday when he wouldn't let me go sailing; I wish I had said that I wasn't, and that he's all right every time. I can't think why he told me to be brave, just now. Is anything going to happen to me, I wonder?" Whereupon he bethought himself to get up and ask Aunt Crete for an explanation.

Just then his eyes fell upon a picture hanging at the foot of his bed. He had not noticed it the night before. He remembered now that when he went to bed the moon shone into his room so brightly that he had not lighted the gas. It was a full-size head done in water colors. So lifelike that the blue eyes and lovely mouth seemed to smile down at the boy, who gave it a long, worshipful look, wondering greatly, the while, why it had been taken from the library. It was a delight to have it in his room, but why had it been given to him? His father liked that picture better than any of the others. Tears came into the boy's eyes as

he gazed, and thought what a heaven of joy it would be if his mother had indeed come into his room once more -- from that long journey whence, he well knew, there is no returning. Only a little over a year since she went away, his beautiful mother.

It seemed long ago in one sense, yet her words and tones and looks were vivid as ever. He turned away suddenly and made a rush for the dining room.

"Aunt Crete, where has father gone, and when will he be back?"

Miss Lucretia Pierson, Mr. Pierson's elder sister, who had guided his household since his wife's death, turned a pair of keen gray eyes upon her nephew, and studied his face for a moment, to discover if she could whether the boy had any suspicions that this was a journey out of the common order, before she answered.

"Your father has gone to Massachusetts on important business; and I think he expects to be gone two or three weeks."

"So long!" and Wayne's eager face shadowed.

"Well," he said, after a moment, "father said you would tell me all about it; that he hadn't time. What is there to tell?"

"Wait till after breakfast," Aunt Crete said, willing to postpone her communications as long

as possible. "We can't talk over family matters very well while Ann is coming and going with the waffles."

No sooner was breakfast over than Aunt Crete was hurried to the library by her impatient nephew, whose eyes were at once observant of certain changes in the room, especially that a fine oil painting of a sunset scene hung in the place of his mother's picture.

"Aunt Crete, what does this mean? Why was my mother's picture taken from here? It was the prettiest picture in the room." The boy's tone expressed grief and a suggestion of indignation.

"Well," began Aunt Crete, after an aggravatingly long pause, "that's a part of the whole story." Then she added grimly, half to herself, "I do wish your father would tell his own secrets, and not leave it for me to do."

"Secrets! I like secrets; go on! tell quick, please." Wayne was in a quiver of excitement.

Aunt Crete's hair was sprinkled with gray, and she had passed through many trying experiences, but this was one of the "hard spots," needing more tact and wisdom than she possessed. She drew the boy down beside her on the couch, and began in a voice that sounded strange even to herself.

"Wayne, did you never guess, not one little bit, that changes are coming to this house?"

"Changes? What can you mean, Aunt Crete? The very worst thing that could happen to this house has come already. You and father are not going to die, too, are you?"

"Did it never enter my boy's mind that he might, sometime, have a new mother?"

"A new mother! Nobody can have but one real mother. Do you mean a *step*mother?" — with ominous emphasis on that word "step." "Aunt Crete, you must be joking. Tell me the whole truth right out in plain words."

"Well, then, here it is. Your father is going to marry a Mrs. Hamilton of Boston. He has gone there now, for that purpose; he will bring her home with him, and she will be your new mother — or *step*mother."

There it was, plain and hard. Aunt Crete's soul writhed in pain for the boy, though she gave no outward sign. If only he were one of those careless rollicking fellows who would forget all about it in ten minutes, and bound away with a laugh and a whistle! but he was not. He would brood over it in solitude; his intense nature would be stirred to its depths, and he might become rebellious, or morbid and gloomy. The boy's face had grown white as his aunt talked, and his eyes glowed with something like anger as he asked: —

"Did — did my father take my mother's picture out of the library?"

"No," Aunt Crete assured him, "I did that; I thought you would like it to be in your room after this."

"A stepmother!" the boy groaned, as if in that word he had sounded the depths of all misery. "Somebody else in mother's place! How could father do it? I can't! I won't stand it! I *won't!*"

And then this boy, with the instincts of a man, rushed away to his room; he must be alone with his sorrow and his anger. It is pitiful to see boyish lips compressed, and youthful brows drawn with mental pain. Aunt Crete suffered with this boy. She said to herself, as he dashed away: —

"Yes, I've made a mess of it! I knew I would. It does seem a strange state of things, I declare. The fact is, it is downright cruelty to that child, and nothing else. Men are queer!"

Then Aunt Crete fell to congratulating herself that she was as "the angels in heaven," knowing nothing, by personal experience, of this most mysterious troublous ordinance — marriage.

Wayne had believed himself to be getting too old to cry; but once in his room, hot tears and fierce sobs had their way.

So that was what his father had meant when he spoke to him about being brave! Certainly

he did need courage to face such an awful trial. The bitterest drop in his cup was the feeling that his mother was forgotten. Somebody else was to come into that house, and live in her room and use her things! And father was willing to have even mother's picture put out of his sight! He must have known about it, and bought that handsome new one to take its place. It was dreadful to be angry with father, but he was! The more the poor boy thought about it, the fiercer his anger burned. He recalled his father's words that morning. Was it only that morning? It seemed to him that he had heard the news weeks ago — "Believe that your father thinks he is acting for the best good of all concerned."

How could it be possible that this horrible thing about to happen could be for the good of anybody in that house?

"I won't stand it! I'll go away, somewhere!" he declared in frenzy, as he got up and paced the floor after the manner of an excited man. "I'll pack my trunk this minute and be off before they can get here."

He rushed toward the hall door, intent upon bringing his trunk at once from the attic, but as he went, something stopped him. It was what had often checked him before, — his mother's eyes. When she was living, it had often needed but a look from her to set right

his wayward spirit. It seemed to the boy that she beckoned him now, to stop; he fancied he could hear her voice: —

"Take care, mother's boy! keep the reins steady. Don't let that temper of yours run away with you. Try to bear it patiently."

"Oh, mother! mother!" he broke into a passionate cry, "I can't, I *can't!* It will kill me. Oh, if I only could die!"

He meant it, this poor boy, just as much as we older ones, when with every nerve tense with anger or sorrow we wish ourselves dead. Yet as he looked into those eyes and longed for his mother's presence, his fierce mood insensibly softened. On the bureau near where he stood was a box where he treasured little keepsakes of his mother. As he opened it now, and brought them out, tears rained over his face. There was a pair of light gloves that she had last worn, shaped to her hands; how well he remembered those hands, small and white and plump. A fine lace-edged handkerchief with a faint violet odor clinging to it, and a light blue satin ribbon that she used to wear about her neck. They brought vividly before him the fair sweet mother with loving eyes. He had other mementoes of her; costly ones, of gold, and silver, and precious stones, but none of them brought her warm tender presence, like those

which the imaginative boy had secured for his own.

When Aunt Crete came in search of her boy, he was lying on the lounge, asleep, and the hand which pillowed his cheek held his mother's handkerchief and gloves.

"Sleeping for sorrow!" Aunt Crete murmured, and she went out softly.

In the library that evening the boy sat alone in the twilight, still engaged in puzzling his young brain over life and its mysteries. It was there that his aunt found him, and he began at once: —

"Aunt Crete, I wish you would explain one thing to me. Why isn't it just as hard for father to put somebody else into mother's place as it is for me?"

Aunt Crete was silent for a whole minute. The truth was, the same perplexing question had come to her, but she had dismissed it as belonging to the mysteries of that mystic sacrament — marriage, of which she could not be supposed to have knowledge. How should she be able to explain to the boy?

At last she said: "My dear boy, don't you know there are a good many things that puzzle wiser heads than yours? When you get to be a great scientist, try to unravel some of these knotty points. Perhaps your father would say that the fact of his having been very

happy with your mother, was an excellent reason for marrying again: because he missed such companionship, and was unhappy and desolate without it."

"But he had us; why wasn't that enough? O Aunt Crete, you will always live here, won't you?"

He asked the question eagerly, and hung upon her answer. Here was another "hard spot." It seemed impossible to tell him that she must go away as soon as his father returned, but it had to be done.

He bore it better than she had feared, the greater trouble having dulled his heart to all lesser ones; but he murmured desolately that he could never get on without her, and begged her to change her mind and stay.

"No," she said firmly, "I shall not be expected to stay. This is not my home, you know; I only came because your father needed me, and he will not need me any more."

"Perhaps he will not need me any more, either," said Wayne, with slow bitterness; "I wish I could go away. I'll tell you what, Aunt Crete, I'll come and live with you! Why, we can have jolly times!"

Boy-like, for the moment he forgot his wretchedness, and his face lighted with a new hope. Aunt Crete's heart went out with a great longing to the dear boy whose eyes looked so

wistfully into hers. She would have asked no greater joy in life than to have been able to take him to her heart and home; but she must not feed him upon false hopes, and her tone told nothing of her heart.

"There are several reasons why we can't do that. In the first place, we shouldn't have anything to live on; I haven't much in the world besides the old house, and I live a long way from any good school. But the chief reason is, that your father would never consent to it. He wants his boy with him."

"Does he? If he cares for me, why does he go and do something that I just hate and despise!"

The passionate look that his aunt hated to see, came into his face again. She feared a stormy life for this sensitive highly organized temperament.

"We were happy together," continued Wayne, "as happy as we could be, without mother; and now it is all spoiled. A stranger coming in her place, and you gone! I shall get into all sorts of trouble, I know I shall. She'll want me to do things that I won't do, and then there'll be trouble with father. You don't seem to understand how hard it is going to be for me."

How little he guessed what depths of tenderness were hidden behind Aunt Crete's calm face and business-like ways; neither could he see

the tears on her cheeks, for the twilight had deepened into darkness as they talked.

"Come and sit here by me," she said presently, "I want to give you a little lecture. I can do it better in the dark; then if you look cross, I shall not know it. Wayne, when you were on the banks of the St. Lawrence last summer, if you had seen a boy in a sail-boat steering toward the rapids as fast as he could go, and there was no one to warn him, you would surely have shouted and signalled to him that he was in danger, wouldn't you? Now, I see whirlpools ahead for you, and I'm going to warn you. Wayne, dear, one need not go over the rapids to wreck his life.

"One of your dangers is selfishness; you are forgetting that there is anybody but yourself to be made happy, and you are angry with your father, questioning his rights, and even his love for you! Then, you are conjuring up troubles that may never come, and cultivating a wicked prejudice against one whom you have never seen. She may turn out to be the best friend you have in the world. There's one danger for you, my boy, that is at the bottom of all the others. To find fault with what God lets come to you, is to rebel against him. He had some people long ago, who rebelled, and because of it they had to spend the best part of their lives in the wilderness; there was no

other way to bring them to their senses. I do hope, Wayne, that your life will not have to go by the way of the wilderness."

"I'm in it this minute," said Wayne, "just as dark and ugly a piece of woods as can be found."

The relations between Wayne and his mother had been peculiar. Being the only child he was much with her, and in consequence grew wise beyond his years. The fear of grieving her had been his strongest motive for good conduct. He almost literally shared every thought with her, and was always on the look-out to shield her from annoyance or danger.

It was months after her death before the boy could open his heart to his father. There was an element of sternness in Mr. Pierson's character. Wayne obeyed him because he both honored and feared him; he had obeyed his mother because it was his delight to please her.

Of late, however, a strong and tender bond had grown up between father and son. Mr. Pierson had made his son his companion in walks and drives and short journeys, and there had come to the boy a proud sense of comradeship which had charmed him. And now, behold, a stranger was to come between them!

As the time drew near when the bridal party might be looked for, Aunt Crete grew nervous and excited. She had not fully obeyed her

brother's instructions; there was something more to reveal to Wayne; something from which she shrank. So it was not until the afternoon before the travellers were expected that she girded herself for another conflict. Wayne, at the piano, had played persistently for nearly an hour; he had gone over all the tempestuous pieces in his repertoire, his nervous excitement finding vent in the loudest pedal, then his mood suddenly changed, and he ran his fingers over the keys in improvised minor strains. Aunt Crete sat in a shaded corner and watched the back of his head. It was a beautiful head, covered with waves of light brown hair; yet she noticed that its pose was slightly proud and defiant, whereat she sighed. She sympathized with those dirgelike notes, yet how did she know, after all, but that what she had to tell might be received with joy?

At last the piano was closed, and Wayne came over to her.

"I have been thinking," she said, "how nice it would be if you had another boy here to visit with."

"Yes," said Wayne, "two boys can have better times than one, if the other fellow is the right sort."

"If both fellows are of the right sort, you mean," retorted Aunt Crete. "I'm glad you would like it, because it looks now as if there

would be two boys in this house, instead of one."

"What!" said Wayne. "Aunt Crete, what do you mean?" Now it *must* be told; and she hurried on.

"There is another boy, Wayne; your — Mrs. Hamilton has a son somewhere near your own age, and he will come here to live, of course. O Wayne, I do hope you will be brothers indeed, without any step between."

She spoke in a matter-of-fact tone, as though it were an everyday occurrence to have step-brothers suddenly let down into one's life. Wayne stood transfixed, his eyes on Aunt Crete's face, as if he had lost the power of speech. Before he recovered it, the door-bell rang and guests were shown in.

In the pine grove near the house was a shaded nook that Wayne claimed for his very own. To that retreat he rushed with his astounding piece of news, like one pursued.

II.

He meant to be Good.

TO say that the Pierson home was in a state of expectancy, is to put it mildly. The very chairs, as they stood in formal rows against the walls, told that something unusual was about to happen. Absolutely fleckless cleanliness and propriety were observable everywhere; but if Aunt Crete had really tried to banish every suggestion of a home, she could not have succeeded better. She had done nothing of the kind, poor woman, but had made an earnest effort to accomplish her best, albeit her heart felt like lead.

She was at this moment arrayed in her old-fashioned bristling black silk with a garniture made of lace and ribbon choked about her neck. It did not become her, and she had been heard to declare that she never felt at home in it. Possibly she had chosen it for the day on this very account; certain it is that in her inmost heart she never expected to feel at home in that house again. She had taken her seat in the parlor, in the straightest backed chair that the

room contained, and without even knitting work to keep her company. This also was a concession to the supposed proprieties. She wanted to greet the new Mrs. Pierson in the most respectable manner possible.

In vain did she try to pinion the son of the house at her side. As a rule he was more than willing to stay with Aunt Crete, and liked nothing better than one of her grave, old-fashioned stories for entertainment. But on this day he declared that he hated the parlor, and did not want to change his trousers, the ones he had on were good enough; he had worn them to the minister's house the night before, and he guessed the minister's folks were better than — but here the boy stopped; no names should be mentioned. It was true enough that he hated the parlor. If poor, kind-hearted, blundering Aunt Crete could have understood it, every nerve in the sensitive boy's body quivered with the pain of some cruel memory. In the parlor he could see nothing but his mother's coffin as it had stood in solemn state half buried in flowers. Could he stay in that room to meet *her!* But he knew instinctively that such ideas would shock Aunt Crete, therefore he kept them hidden. Every room in the house was more or less hateful to him on this day; they were all peopled with sorrowful ghosts of the past. When he had to go up and down stairs

past his mother's room, he placed both trembling hands over his ears and rushed headlong as though followed by phantoms. His sick nerves almost made him believe that he heard behind that closed door his mother's voice; there were moments when he was sure of it, and that she was crying.

Still, being the boy he was, Wayne controlled outward sign of these mental conditions, and looked only a little paler than usual, and ate somewhat less at the breakfast table, "saving his appetite for the big dinner they were going to have," his well-intentioned and hopelessly blundering Aunt Crete suggested. After that, Wayne could not finish his glass of milk; he knew he should choke if he tried to swallow.

Let it be confessed right here and now that the chroniclers of this life are perfectly aware that they deal with a history that has been often told. The introduction of a new mother to a shattered home is certainly a very common affair. But so is death common — and love, and hate — and life itself, for that matter; yet so long as there are individual hearts to suffer, there will be individual experiences that will vary from that of other individuals, and that will deserve to be written, it may be, for purposes of study; because, if by understanding human pain we can by any means lessen its

volume, we are bound by the rule that guides all lives worth living, to do so.

That this experience might have been made almost infinitely less painful to Wayne Pierson can be easily demonstrated. Had the father who had sacrificed much for him, and, studying his tastes, had succeeded to a remarkable degree in meeting them, taken up his own cross and gone frankly to the boy with the story of his needs, and by degrees, kindly and wisely as he knew how to do it, had accustomed his son to the thought of a new mother, though it might have been a pain, the loyal part of the boy's nature would have risen to stand by his father, and the utter abject misery that a young soul feels when deserted would have been spared him. To have been made his father's confidant would have gone far in itself toward reconciling a boy like Wayne. That the father's love was weak, and had in it an element of selfishness, was distinctly shown by his shirking his duty in this regard, and putting off his cross on the shrinking shoulders of his maiden sister, who loved the boy Wayne as she did her life, and who had all through the years taken pains to hide that love under a mask of almost indifference. Oh, Wayne knew that his aunt liked him, and was good to him, and sacrificed something to make him comfortable; but that he was her one special and peculiar treasure, dearer

to her than any other creature in the world, the boy never dreamed. A knowledge of this fact would have lessened his pain.

People who do not understand human nature will wonder to hear that Aunt Crete had lain awake nights to plan just how she should divulge the great news to her boy; yet could she have done it more bunglingly had to bungle been her object? Pity those poor mortals who, with warm hearts and good intentions, have yet a genius for blundering; they are not few in number.

Up in his own room, crouching down before the open grate fire which burned for him because he liked open fires, his pale face paler than usual, save for one small bright spot that burned on either cheek, the poor fellow waited for his fate. Every other spot in the house had grown hateful beyond endurance, and he had broken away from Aunt Crete with the passionate announcement that he *would not* stay downstairs and wait for the carriage that was momently expected. He was all but breathless with wonderment as to what would happen next after that carriage arrived. Would his father come in search of him, and should he get his first kiss alone there in his room? If so what should he say, oh, what *could* he say to his father? "I will try to be good," he murmured to the glowing coals, "oh, I will *try!* I don't

want to hurt father as he has hurt me. Mother wouldn't like that; she said a boy should always think first of his father." Then he broke off to wonder further. "Would they perhaps call him downstairs to meet them? And would that other boy, that *awful* boy, be there? Aunt Crete had fancied at times that the other boy would be a relief, even a comfort to Wayne; it might have been so arranged. One can fancy the father sitting some quiet evening in the firelight with his arm about his son, telling him softly, tenderly, of another shadowed home; of a boy near his own age whose father had gone away forever; of a mother who was desolate, like themselves, because of a grave; and of his saying, by and by, when all questions had been asked and answered, and the boy's heart had grown tender over the loneliness of others, some word like this: "What would you think, my boy, of our trying to brighten these two lives? Could not you be a brother to this lonesome fellow? He had a brother, once, but he died. Are you willing to share your father with him, if he will let us have a share in his mother? Wouldn't we all be happier and better able to do our work in the world, if we planned this way of living?"

It could have been done; some such words as that would have made a difference forever in

the life of the desolate lad who crouched before the fire and felt himself deserted and deceived.

If his father had but talked it over with him! Still, poor fellow, he meant to try to be good; and he said to the coals presently, that his father would surely come and find him, and hold him tight for a minute, and kiss him, and he would say to him just that, "Father, I will try to be good."

And then the bell rang, and there was the opening and closing of doors, and the sound of trunks being banged up the steps, and all the hum and bustle of arrival; and the boy sat and waited; strained his ears for the sound of his father's voice, and of that other voice; and held his breath and felt faint and giddy as he heard their steps ascending the stairs. They were coming together, then! If his father would but come alone! But they passed his door at the head of the stairs, and went on, into his father's room. Instinctively he glanced toward the communicating door, although he knew that it was closed. It nearly always stood wide open, and Wayne had been wont to look upon that room as belonging to him almost as much as it did to his father. A dozen times during the process of dressing he ran into it to say a word to his father. A dozen times that day he had closed the door, and opened it again, and closed it. The final decision was that it should be

closed; some rare instinct of self-abnegation went with the decision. Since there were to be two in that room instead of one, they would, perhaps, like it better closed. He meant to be good.

He listened for his father's voice and heard it, a cheery, happy voice; once he laughed. Wayne had always liked his father's laugh; he did not understand, poor fellow, why it should strike like a blow on his heart just then. Certainly he wanted his father to be happy.

They went down again, both of them! Wayne listened, and *listened;* he thought they would come in; he could hear his own voice saying politely: "How do you do, ma'am," by way of greeting. Would that be the way to do it, if one meant to be good? But they went down. The tension on his heart lessened a little. His father would go with her to the foot of the stairs, and come back alone in search of him; he waited and *waited*, and no one came. If his father had but gone up to the boy that afternoon, it might have made a difference with Wayne's whole life's story. Was ever truer poet than he who recorded as the saddest words, "It might have been"?

Three-quarters of an hour afterward came Susie, the second girl.

"Mr. Wayne," she said, "your father wants to know where you are, and why you are not

downstairs; he says you are to come to the parlor right away."

The parlor! if they would only let him say, "How do you do, ma'am," in any other room than that!

He did not make a good impression.

"Well, sir," his father said, "where were you, my boy? I expected to get sight of you as soon as our carriage turned into the square, and here we have been at home for nearly an hour."

Actually his father had expected to see the boy come rushing around the corner to greet him. Why not? That was the way he had been doing, of late, after ever so short an absence from home. On the boy's part it seemed that his father must know that wherever he turned his tear-filled eyes in that room, they saw only an open coffin. All that the father saw was the trace of tears, and he did not like it.

"Augusta," he said, "this is the boy." His voice sounded cold. It seemed quite as if they were planning to hire an errand boy.

"How do you do, my dear," said Mrs. Pierson, and she touched her lips to his pale cheek. She was tall and fair, and had blue eyes, and very light brown hair that was arranged in what the boy called "crinkles."

All that he said about this experience afterward was that she did not look in the least as

he had supposed that mothers always did. Her voice was pleasant and she went on, talking about him.

"He looks pale, Edward, and rather frail. He is only a year younger than my Leon, and there is the greatest possible difference in their appearance. Not that he isn't tall enough, too tall for his years. We must try to broaden you out. I am afraid you do not take enough out-of-door exercise. Leon will remedy all that, though; he is a regular athlete."

It was all very kindly said. She could not be expected to know how disagreeable it was to the boy. Hadn't he been told all his life that he was too fond of his books, and too little inclined for out-of-door sports. Wasn't Aunt Crete always exclaiming anxiously over his "thin chest." And didn't he almost despise athletes? Great rough fellows he thought them, who were always behind in their studies. He had not a word to say to this new lady, and he remained silent and awkward. His father darted him an annoyed glance which but sealed his lips the closer, and finally said coldly, —

"Well, my son, if you have nothing to say, we will excuse you." But he followed the boy into the hall and spoke sternly.

"Wayne, this is by no means the sort of greeting that I had expected at your hands. I thought I could trust you, and believed that

you would honor your father. I want you to understand that I shall expect you to show a very different face to your mother the next time she sees you. If you cannot control yourself to-night, you would better not come to dinner until after we are done."

Wayne turned without a word and began to mount the stairs. His father looked after him with a yearning heart and a heavy sigh. The boy was actually stubborn and meant to fight. He had not dreamed of such a condition of things. Wayne had always been a gentlemanly boy.

The door into the dining room had stood open, and Aunt Crete had been a forced listener to this little scene. She appeared in the hall now, and did not mend matters. Her face was red, and her voice like an icicle.

"If I had been you, Edward, I would have choked myself before I spoke in that way to Wayne; the poor child's heart is almost broken."

"I am not aware that he has cause for excessive grief," answered the master of the house, coldly, "and I look to you, Lucretia, not to uphold him in rebellion. I have done what I believe is for the best good of all concerned, and my son must understand that I am not accountable to him for my actions."

"*I* uphold!" said Aunt Crete. "The land

knows I—" then she stopped. Nobody had seen Aunt Crete cry for years; but just then she distinctly felt a lump in her throat that she knew was as large as a hen's egg, and was certain that she could not trust her voice with another word.

Mr. Pierson turned and went back into the parlor, and perhaps he may be pardoned if he gave the door a more determined push in closing than there was need. The unreasonable man was disappointed in his home coming.

Never was there a more forlorn and utterly vanquished "fighter" than that poor fellow who threw himself on his bed in an agony of weeping. He did not go downstairs for any dinner; he was sure that a mouthful would have choked him. Aunt Crete came herself with turkey and cranberry and all manner of dainties, and coaxed; but he only shook his head and murmured in muffled tones, "Aunt Crete, I would if I could, but I can't."

"Poor little fellow," said Aunt Crete, "it is too everlasting mean!" But she made no attempt to speak the words she might have said. Her heart had been much ruffled by her brother's stern condemnatory words.

Late that night a small brown head raised itself from its pillow that was all but wet through with tears, and listened eagerly. Its owner

heard his father's step moving about the next room, and his father's voice. He listened, breathless, as the steps moved toward that closed door; his father would come in and kiss him good night — he always did, no matter how late home he was. Then he would put his arms round his neck, and whisper in the darkness that he meant to be good, and had meant so all the time, only the words would not come.

And the father, the other side the wall, stood still and considered. Should he go in to see Wayne? No, he believed not. The boy might still be obstinate, and he might say something in his annoyance that he would wish unsaid. He would wait until morning and give the youngster a chance to be reasonable.

So, for the first time in his life, when his father was at home, Wayne Pierson received no good-night kiss from him. If he had, many things might have been different.

III.

"If only—"

WHEN Wayne got downstairs the next morning he was relieved to find that his father, having an important business engagement, had taken the first train to town, and that his stepmother, fatigued with her journey, had not yet risen.

Aunt Crete, too, was gone. She had bidden him good-by the night before, although he had secretly determined to surprise her by being at the station, but he did not waken in time.

It was a doleful breakfast he took by himself, smarting. the while, under the sense of his father's displeasure, and forlornly desolate without Aunt Crete. It began to seem to him that he had no friend left in that house except Ann, the cook, who had lived in the family ever since he could remember, and who came now with cheery words and a plate of muffins. In momentary dread of "that stranger's" appearance, he made short work of breakfast and hurried off to school.

Mrs. Pierson was more than pleased with her

new home when she stepped out on the broad porch and gazed about her that morning; she was charmed. The house was substantial and roomy, standing on an eminence which commanded fine views in all directions. If the style of architecture was somewhat old-fashioned, it was atoned for by grand old trees and spacious grounds stretching and sloping to the shore of a wide river which went placidly on its way to the near-by sea, so near that this morning its blue expanse seemed in the vista between the trees but a piece of the sky reaching down to meet the earth. It was early springtime, when the willows were just beginning to show tender green against dark pines. The blue and green and brown and purplish tints mingled in a soft haze as if nature had but sketched into the landscape a few mere hints of what the summer glory might be.

Mrs. Pierson took in all the delightful possibilities of the place, feeling that sense of elation which is born of possession. She walked up and down the long porch exulting in the pure air, contrasting it all with the life she had lived for the last several years in a crowded city, with limited space and limited means. How wonderful that she should suddenly have come into this fair heritage! And stranger still that the love of a noble man should have come into her lonely life, and that her boy should have

again a good father, who would care for his well-being as if he were his very own. He had promised it, and she trusted him absolutely.

The newcomer found it pleasant to go on this little tour of exploration about her husband's home, quite alone, tarrying where she pleased, to look or muse. She passed on into the parlor and library, large pleasant rooms full of windows commanding charming views. She studied the furnishings. Her taste was fastidious, and another woman's individuality was expressed there: a woman whom, in spite of herself, she regarded as a sort of rival. It would be natural to find fault with her work, but there *was* no fault, and it half nettled the new woman that it should be so.

She sank into a luxurious chair, and the mirror opposite told her that her lilac morning gown trimmed with soft lace was extremely becoming, and that she fitted well into her surroundings. Again she congratulated herself, while her heart brimmed over in pride and gratitude.

And yet, and yet — with all this affluence and satisfaction, there was an undeniable fly in the ointment — there usually is — the remembrance of it came now with a pang to Mrs. Pierson: *that boy*, her husband's son! There came also a sharp reminder of the altogether kind and fatherly way in which her husband had

taken her son to his heart. It made her wince, yet she hastened to apologize for herself after this manner.

"That is a very different matter. My dear handsome boy wins everybody at once; but this cold, silent fellow, actually assuming haughty airs! Who could love him? Oh, why did he have to be here to make unpleasantness?"

But it startled her to find such thoughts trying to get possession. She resolutely shook them off for the time, and continued her survey of the house.

The upper rooms were delightful. It was as if a kind and thoughtful friend had selected carpets, draperies, and paper hangings with special regard to the taste of one who was coming there a stranger. She lingered in the exquisitely appointed guest chamber, but unwelcome thoughts came to her how that other wife had been busy and happy planning and arranging it — for her! She went from it to Wayne's room, and found there the same careful attention to every detail of grace and beauty.

"Still, it is better suited to a girl than a boy," was Mrs. Pierson's mental comment, "and that is one trouble with that boy: he has been spoiled; one can see that he has been taught to consider himself of utmost importance."

The object that caught and held her attention, however, was the portrait of Wayne's mother. It impressed her at once as a face of marvellous sweetness and purity. The lovely eyes looked directly into hers with a searching gaze. Did they say: —

"You have taken my place in this home. Will you be a true mother to my boy?"

The better nature of this woman stood in reverence before that other woman, whose place on earth she had taken. There came to her a sense of unworth and insufficiency. It would not be easy to fill this office which she had dared accept; it would require her best. Well — she would try; she would do her duty by her husband's son as far as in her lay. Yet, even with the resolve, came a sigh of deep regret that there was such a person in existence, and there swept over her an unreasoning wave of jealousy and dislike not only for the boy, but for that pictured face. So began the struggles of a life that had the promise of unalloyed happiness.

Mrs. Pierson made haste away from the searching eyes, and turned her thoughts to more agreeable subjects. Her son Leon, her idol, was coming that very day. There were little motherly touches to be put to the lovely room set apart for him. How delighted he would be with this beautiful home! if only —

and again the mother sighed as she thought of that other boy, and of what she had been promising. A shadow fell across her spirit as it occurred to her for the first time that the boys might take a dislike to each other, and endless quarrels result. In such case one of them would have to be sent away to boarding school, and Mrs. Pierson knew well which should go if the question were left to her to settle.

Eliphalet was the name of Wayne's pony. A farmer back on the hills, with whom the family had boarded one summer, had presented him to Wayne, on the boy's eighth birthday, a promising young colt. In a transport of gratitude Wayne had forthwith called his little horse "Eliphalet" after the donor. The formidable name soon shortened to "Liph," and they grew up together. The gentle creature seemed to know almost as much, Wayne thought, as another boy. He developed into a beautiful animal, with shining coat and silky mane; he was fleet and spirited, yet perfectly obedient to his master's voice.

Wayne, who never tired of skimming over the country on Liph's back, no sooner returned from school that afternoon than he set out for a long ride. He omitted going first into the house to be welcomed. There was no Aunt Crete waiting for him, and his intuitions told

him that his stepmother was no more desirous of his presence than he was of hers.

The ride lengthened itself; the boy wished that he could stretch it out indefinitely; could ride on and on, beyond that glory in the western sky, to some-other-where, and so escape the home coming that he dreaded.

At last, however, he trotted up the driveway in time to see his father and a boy, a little taller than himself, alight from the carriage at the door. The "other boy" had come! Wayne would have gone on to the stable, but his father, as he went into the house, by a motion of his hand and a look, said that he was to stay and be introduced to the newcomer. Mrs. Pierson had descended the steps and stood with outstretched arms to welcome her boy. While she held him close, showering kisses, Wayne felt a thrill go through him. So had his mother welcomed him. Would ever anybody do it again like that? Aunt Crete loved him, but it was not her way to show it by caresses. His stepmother rose several degrees in his estimation. He felt almost sorry for her when her boy broke impatiently away exclaiming: —

"Oh, there now, hold up! Don't lather a fel—!"

"Leon!" His mother's tone was sharp and imperative.

Slang was her abhorrence, as Leon well knew,

so he hastened to atone; for, fond as his mother was of him, she could treat him to hours of silent coldness when displeased. Throwing an arm about her, he said with that smile which always disarmed her: —

"Why, you make as much fuss, Motherie, as if I had been gone three years instead of three weeks."

Then, catching sight of Wayne who had dismounted and stood holding his horse, he called out: —

"Hallo! Who's this? Oh, that's the little popinjay you wrote me about, is it?"

Wayne had advanced a step or two and was about to extend his hand, but drew it back when he heard this rude salutation, his cheeks flushing with resentment.

"Ah! Quite a pretty boy," Leon went on in a mincing tone. "He's bashful, isn't he? What's your name, dear?" He came nearer as he spoke, and gave Liph a poke in the ribs which made him rear.

"Shame on you, Leon," his mother exclaimed, suppressing a smile; "you are becoming perfectly lawless."

Leon had a secret ambition to be thought so. One of his mother's friends went about saying rude things to people in a serio-comic way, making everybody laugh, and the boy admired it.

"If only —"

Wayne wheeled his horse sharply about and went rapidly toward the stable without having spoken a word to his stepbrother, who sent a derisive laugh after him. Once in the stable, with the door fastened, Wayne fairly ground his teeth in rage. That impudent, hateful, horrid boy! To insult him in the very beginning. In his own home, too! His heart swelled in bitterness against his father. It was not enough to put another in his dear mother's place, but there must be that hideous fellow to make life miserable for him. The thought of his coming into that house to stay was perfectly intolerable. The boy had been trying for the last twenty-four hours to become reconciled to the thought of another boy coming there to claim "father" as his father, and having a right to everything about the place. There had been brief minutes during this time when he tried to assure himself that it would be pleasant to have a nice boy there, and have good times together. He had almost persuaded himself into that belief when the dream of pleasant companionship was rudely dispelled. The moment he caught sight of Leon's bold black eyes and something like a leer on his otherwise handsome face, his heart sank like lead.

Mr. Pierson, through a half-closed blind, watched with eager curiosity the meeting be-

tween the two boys. He was too far off to hear any words, but he saw that one boy with smiling face appeared to be making advances which the other met with silence and dark looks, even turning abruptly away in the midst of it. The father was vexed and disappointed, and the son was now in no mood to seek the reconciliation for which he had longed.

This was a beginning which did not promise well for pleasant relations between the boys, and no one who had taken pains to study their different temperaments and training would have hoped for it.

It was well that Aunt Crete was not present in those first few weeks of the new family, or there might have been an open rupture. As it was, there were no keen eyes to look on and judge, and it may be glow with anger. Mr. Pierson was as blind as most men who have "married a wife." The halo about her was as yet undimmed. Everything connected with her was sacred, even the young scapegrace who was all deference and reverence in his stepfather's presence, but in his absence mimicked his grave dignity and laughed to scorn his words of advice.

Mr. Pierson had resolved, in the beginning of his infatuation for Mrs. Hamilton, that he would take her son into his heart as well; and it would not be difficult, bright merry fellow

that he was. When one is disposed to be blind and deaf to faults in another, the way is open for genuine liking. Mr. Pierson had ambitions, too; the world should for once see a family who, maintaining that relation to each other which is supposed to be peculiarly productive of strife, were nevertheless beautifully harmonious. He was prepared to exercise patient forbearance toward his stepson, and surely his wife would love his sweet spirited boy. But he had apparently misjudged. Here was his submissive son taking on a rebellious attitude, a boy remarkable for loveliness of character suddenly become unlovely. He could not understand it; this lawyer who was rated by his fellows as a man of keen perceptions. He did not know that there was quietly carried on in his own house a series of cunning devices for tormenting and humiliating his own son — "jokes," the inquisitors called them.

His own amusement was one reason why Leon never lost an opportunity to annoy Wayne, at least that was the one he gave to his mother, who sometimes reproved him, though with a smile lurking behind the words — she herself was coldly kind to Wayne, and such kindness when long endured is little better than a series of blows. There was a deeper reason than love of fun though, which

was the secret of Leon's actions, and that was jealousy. One source of pique was Wayne's musical gifts, cultivated by able instructors and much practice. When he played for guests it was gall and wormwood to Leon to hear praises showered upon the performer. He did what he could to embarrass Wayne at such times, usually managing to sit near the piano and keep up an undertone of talk, teasing and mocking until the victim was perfectly furious. The auditors sometimes called the music "spirited" when Wayne, with a frown on his brow, pounding the keys with vim, longed instead to let his force fly at the exasperating fellow who stood smiling by his side officiously turning the leaves in a way to cause blunders if possible. Once the young musician was adroitly tripped up on his way to the piano, and nobody but the victim knew how it came about that a boy sprawled on the floor, his music scattered about him to his own and his father's intense mortification, while his amiable step-brother flew to his assistance.

There were other indignities too numerous to mention, and it must not be supposed that Wayne bore them in silence. He had been carefully taught that resort to blows in the settlement of difficulties was brutal. It was not possible though to refrain from pouring out his indignation in a torrent of words, met

by jeers and rude laughter, which often misled the parents into thinking that the boys were making merry instead of quarrelling. And through it all Wayne had no sympathy from his blinded father. It was strange how often the boy appeared at a disadvantage; contrasted with Leon's bright ways he seemed dull and sullen, and it was charged to chronic rebellion. We are severest on the faults of those we love most, just because we love them and long to have them blameless.

And why did not Wayne tell his father all and claim his protection? Partly because he had the usual schoolboy code of honor which condemns one who reports the evil doings of another boy. There was another reason: Once in a desperate fit he had broken out with an account of some outrageous prank of Leon's, when his father silenced him with: —

"My son, I am astonished. Have you no more manliness than to come to me with complaints? You must learn to take fun as it is meant, and like other boys who know how to take care of themselves."

These words cut the nerves of the sensitive boy like a knife. Never again would he complain to his father. He went away by himself, and there followed one of those conflicts which change children into men and women. Oh! the pity that it should begin so early.

IV.

A Crisis.

THEY were father and son; even a careless observer would have known that. As Wayne Pierson had grown to manhood, certain marked characteristics of his father's face had repeated themselves in a pronounced way in his. It is a question whether the very similarity of their natures did not help to make it more difficult for them to understand each other. The merest glance into the room at this time would have shown that disturbing forces were at work. The father's tones were as cold as ice.

"I sent for you, Wayne, not to have a lengthy conversation, but to speak certain very plain words. I am simply weary of this sort of life, and feel that I have endured it perhaps too long. It is of no use to hide the fact that you are a sad disappointment to me; instead of improving under the most patient treatment possible, matters seem to be growing worse. Every report that comes to me shows an advance in — I hesitate to pronounce the words,

but suilenness and vindictiveness seem to have become characteristics of yours. I am afraid that the mother whose memory you have professed to love would not recognize her son if she were with him now. I can only hope that she, at least, is spared the pain you have given me.

"But I did not intend to say this. It has all been said before, and proved useless. My words this time shall be to the point. I have reached a decision. Either you will apologize to Leon for this latest insult, and in my presence, that I may see and hear for myself, or —"

He paused involuntarily as his son turned from the window and confronted him. The young man's face certainly offered no encouragement to him to proceed.

"Well, sir," Wayne said at last, "'or' what?"

"Or consider yourself no longer a college student at my expense, with every want even anticipated. I choose to bestow my money upon a son who at least tries to show me that he appreciates my help."

Wayne's heretofore pale face flushed so deep a crimson that it almost seemed as though the blood must burst through the sensitive skin. His lips were quivering, but he was biting them to prevent it, and his eyes flashed ominously as he threw back his head with a gesture

that was peculiarly irritating to his father, perhaps because it was his own, and said: —

"I shall certainly offer no apology to Leon Hamilton, sir."

"Very well, then; take the consequences. Consider yourself excused. In your present mood I have seen quite enough of you."

As he spoke, Mr. Pierson wheeled away from his desk, but Wayne did not wait for him to rise. Without further word or glance he rushed from the room, out into the side yard, down the lane, and so by a path well known to his childhood, which led him presently to a lonely place along the beach, so dreary-looking and unattractive to others that they rarely visited it; but the boy, Wayne, had fought out many of his childish battles just there, and by a sort of instinct he turned to it again in his young manhood, now that another crisis in his life seemed to have been reached.

Nearly six years since he began to tramp there as a child, and tell to the restless waves the story of his humiliations at the hand of his stepbrother; but never had the passionate heart of the boy been so stirred as now, when on the verge of manhood he paced the sanded shore, and added yet another chapter.

"Since the first hour that he came, he has done his utmost to rob me of my father and my home, and this is the climax! he has suc-

ceeded! I am not only worse than motherless, but my father has deliberately thrown me off, and taken in my place this usurper who has hated and bullied me through the years, and been upheld always by his mother. I apologize to Leon Hamilton! My father will find that I will follow my dead mother to the grave, rather than that. He is 'weary of this sort of life'; who isn't? He has 'borne enough,' he thinks; he will find that I have! The crisis has come at last; I knew it would."

He could not think connectedly; he could not give even the waves, that came constantly up to hear about it, a lucid account of how the climax had been reached. He could only tramp about like some wounded creature of the forest, and utter at intervals half sentences that merely hinted at the fires of passion and of pain that were burning within him.

Apparently a climax had at last been reached, and the way to it had been long and hard. One curious fact was that it had been hard for most of the parties concerned, and not one of them had been able to imagine to any extent the other's pain.

There, for instance, was Mrs. Pierson; it will be remembered that she entered this home with a resolve in her heart to do her duty in full measure; and it shall be frankly admitted that at times she had earnestly tried to do it. She

had brought with her a sincere affection for the head of the house, and a real desire to make a home for him. But she had also brought one consuming, unreasoning passion. She had an idol, and its name was Leon. For this son of hers no sacrifice was too great. Despite the affection which she certainly had for her husband, she would never have become his wife had it not been plain to her that for Leon to secure a father who was an eminent lawyer would be much better for him than to remain only the son of a quiet widow who had but a few hundreds a year of her own, and no influence in the great world. She would not have liked to own that she married her husband for the sake of her son, yet if she had understood her own heart, that might not have been too bald a way to put it.

Plainly she did not understand her heart very well, nor begin to realize how hard it would be to open it to the son as well as the father; yet, as has been said, she had tried.

Neither was she inclined to be hard upon herself for her evident failure. Could she be blamed for taking her own boy's part? Who should stand by him if not his mother? Then, when one boy was good-natured and merry and fun-loving, and the other was silent and cold and sullen, could any one be blamed for seeing just where the fault lay? On those rare occa-

sions when even she was compelled to see faults in her own son, she excused herself for shielding him on the plea that the poor boy had no father, and that she must be both mother and father to him.

As for Mr. Pierson, it would not be fair to him to say that in planning his second marriage he had forgotten his son. On the contrary, he had thought much about him, and had convinced himself that the step he was about to take would be in every way an advantage to the boy; but this was not until he had yielded himself so entirely to Mrs. Hamilton's influence as to feel sure that he wanted her, and her only, for his own life. If the woman of his choice had chosen him for a like motive, it would have been better for the son, because there is no genuine love for a man that does not to a degree include his child. Mr. Pierson had come into the new relations, not only with a determination to do his duty by the boy Leon, but with a yearning affection for him because he was his mother's son, and a real desire to take the place as well as the name of father. What an infinite pity that in all his plans and hopes he failed to take his own boy into partnership!

To go over the story of the years already passed since the new relations began would fill volumes, and would simply be history repeat-

ing itself. For the most part, it was a record of failure. Given such incongruous elements in a home, — none of the persons concerned understanding the others' heart or motive, and at least one of them not caring to understand, — what other record could be made?

Wayne, it will be remembered, had meant "to be good." He had carried that idea in his heart, and struggled with it spasmodically; had the new brother given him half a chance, he would perhaps have come off victor. But it will have to be admitted that Leon Hamilton was inherently selfish and tyrannical. His nature throughout was hard. Not that he had not occasional good impulses, and there was a sense in which he loved his mother; but he loved not her nor anybody nor anything half so well as he loved himself. This inherent trait had been fostered by his mother until he was honest in the belief that the world had been created for his enjoyment, and that whatever hindered that enjoyment must be pushed or kicked out of the way.

They had struggled up through the years, until now Leon was within a few months of his majority and Wayne was just twenty. The two young men were in college together in a town but a few miles from home. That is, they were classmates, but they by this time so thoroughly disliked each other that they

came in contact only when necessity compelled.

It had been arranged early in their college course that Saturdays and Sundays should be spent at home; but on one pretext or another this plan often failed, one or the other remaining in town. When Wayne came out alone, Mrs. Pierson was so disturbed and so full of anxious surmises, as well as of hints that were disagreeable to her stepson, that life for the three was not comfortable. But when Leon came, reporting gayly that Wayne was all right, but had chosen to go off on a lark of his own, it would have made the absent one's sore heart sorer to have known what a thoroughly good time they had without him.

In a curious sense the two young men were rivals in class. Wayne was by nature a student; he worked thoroughly, and commanded the respect of his classmates as well as of the faculty. Leon, on the contrary, lived for what he called "fun," but he had a good memory and was quick-witted and unscrupulous. He could spend half the night in his chosen amusements, then borrow the notes of a careless student, make free translations therefrom, on his cuffs, or any convenient surface that could be easily concealed, snatch at a few lines of the text, put on a bold face, and come off sometimes with flying colors. Occasionally Wayne would

be so enraged by the success of these bare-faced manœuvrings as to lose his presence of mind and make a poorer recitation than his rival. Such an episode was sure to be followed by an extraordinary account of the affair at home, always given laughingly and with such an appearance of high good humor on Leon's part, that Wayne's contrasting indignation was very marked. Sometimes a word of caution would be called forth from the mother after this manner: —

"Leon dear, what a sad tease you are! It really isn't even *college* manners, I should think, to be hilarious over the misfortunes of those who do not happen to be as quick at their studies as you are."

She meant it for good, and it sounded well to the father. What could it be but an unfortunate spirit of jealousy that caused the blood to rush violently to Wayne's face at the sound of the words? There were times when he darted a look at Leon that his mother said afterward was "positively suggestive of danger."

It is not the intention of these historians to linger over the boyhood of the two whose lives were so unfortunately linked. It has been thought wise to give to our readers these glimpses of the beginnings, and to hint at certain of the stumbling-blocks that might, before

they grew large, have been easily taken out of the way; and then to go on to the account of the life-journey as it led through devious paths and often by way of a wilderness up to what we call the end. It is hoped that the reasons for making the record will be made plain as the reader progresses.

But the evening before that interview between Wayne Pierson and his father, with which this chapter opens, Wayne had been hard at work in his room at college. An important recitation, the closing one indeed for the college year, had been scheduled for the next morning, and Wayne, who believed that he stood a fair chance for the honors, was making a last careful preparation, when he was interrupted.

A response to a tap at his door admitted a senior with whom he had a slight acquaintance, who began without ceremony: —

"Pierson, do you know where Hamilton is, this evening?"

"I have not that honor," said Wayne; "I rarely have."

"Well, this time I happen to know, and he is in a bad place. There is another row at Ryder's. Poor little Nixon escaped from there a few minutes ago, and came to me with the story. He says Hamilton is the worst one there; he doesn't know what he

is about, you understand, and I am afraid he will get into very serious trouble. The authorities are especially on the watch for Ryder's place, just now, you remember. It won't mean less than expulsion for every one who is found there. So I thought perhaps — excuse me, I don't want to be officious, but Hamilton is a relative of yours, isn't he?"

"No," said Wayne, with unnecessary emphasis; "he is my father's stepson."

"Oh, — well, I thought you might like to save your father's name, you understand. Something could be done before the discovery comes, but not afterward, I am afraid. I chanced to learn what the outcome would be through — well, no matter who; I won't interrupt you longer; good-night."

Then Wayne dropped his book and leaned his elbows on the table and his head in his hands, and thought. Expulsion, disgrace, dishonor. Were these not what Leon Hamilton deserved? Was there a greater cheat or a more worthless rogue within those college walls than he? Was not his influence among those younger and weaker than himself wholly bad? Yet who knew it? Heretofore the fellow had been sharp enough to escape all publicity, and to maintain a sort of reputation for scholarship, even. Ought he to be helped

to continue his duplicity? But, on the other hand, it was his father, his own splendid father, whose name and reputation were hopelessly linked with this young scamp's. It was his father who paid the college bills and to whom all reports were sent. He seemed to see the whole story of the disgraceful scene at Ryder's blazing in the next day's papers, with his father's name put in bold type. "We understand that young Hamilton, the principal actor in the scene, is the stepson of the eminent lawyer, Edward W. Pierson, Esq." And then would follow sentences that would drag their family affairs before the public, and make his father's face burn with shame. It must not be! He must try to shield his father, even though in doing so he should have to help that villain.

Half an hour afterward, a detective in citizen's dress made his way through the confusion that reigned at the questionable place known as Ryder's, and tried to make plain to the bewildered brain of the chief rioter that a gentleman in a carriage at the door wished to speak to him. It ended in the detective's calling two policemen to his aid, and even then it was with difficulty that Hamilton was conveyed to the carriage. Once within, however, he sank almost immediately into a drunken stupor; and when they reached the college, Wayne and the detec-

tive had but little difficulty in getting the fellow to his room and bed. Then Wayne locked the door upon him, and went to his own room. In the morning, finding the young reveller still sleeping heavily, he again locked the door, and went to breakfast and to his recitation. It was two hours before he came back, to find the lock broken and his prisoner escaped. Later in the day he learned that Hamilton had taken the eleven o'clock train for home. Meantime, the threatened disclosures concerning Ryder's house had taken place later in the evening, and the papers, as Wayne had foreseen, were ablaze with details. A shiver of relief ran through his frame as he glanced them over, and found no mention of the family name. Once more Hamilton had escaped.

The whole affair gloomed the day that would else have been bright for him. The coveted honors had been won, and he was taking home the newspaper account of prizes, with his name at the head. But he was taking also a heavy heart. The time had come when he must certainly break the silence that he had carefully maintained ever since his father had, years before, charged him with being jealous of his stepson, and forbidden him to come with tales of him. This time, disgrace had been too imminent, and his father's name had been shielded at too great a price. The son must

choke down his pride, and let the truth be known now, once for all.

It happened, however, that he reached home by an earlier train than his father, and it was Mrs. Pierson who met him, white with anger, to ask how he dared to follow a fatherless boy to his retreat, after having publicly insulted him, and stolen his honors from him.

It became evident that young Hamilton had not taken an early train for naught. By dint of careful listening, and a quietly put question now and then, Wayne learned that he was supposed to have drugged his stepbrother the night before, and then to have locked him into the room, from which he had escaped with difficulty, the motive being to keep Hamilton away from that important recitation, and so win for himself the honors that but for this would undoubtedly have been his stepbrother's!

Wayne was simply dumfounded over this state of affairs. Well as he thought he knew Leon Hamilton, he had expected to find him, this time, somewhat subdued, and anxious to buy silence. Behold, instead, he had made Wayne's duty well nigh impossible!

Before he had determined just how to try to meet this new state of things, Wayne was summoned to an interview with his father. And the father, who had just come from an exciting talk with his wife and Leon, without asking a

word of explanation from his son, or permitting a suggestion that there might be another side to the story he had heard, had addressed him in the way that has already been told, and then dismissed him from his presence.

V.

Apologies.

AFTER pacing the beach until he was worn out, Wayne turned his steps toward his green sanctum in the pine woods as by natural gravitation. It had been the scene of many a boyish mental conflict, and somehow the spot had a calming influence. Perhaps the resinous fragrance is soothing to sick spirits as well as to diseased lungs.

He sat down on a knoll, leaned his head on his hands, and tried to look the future in the face. His father had again condemned him unheard on the testimony of one to whose faults he was still blind and deaf. He must now begin to plan his life without reference to his father's aid. While he knotted his brows in perplexed thought, he became aware that a familiar form was approaching, and he sprang up in glad surprise, to welcome Aunt Crete.

"Nobody in the house could tell me where you were," she said, as he bent and kissed her as of old. "I thought, though, I should find you here in your old haunts, and when I came

up the hill, Wayne, it looked a little as if you had come out here to settle affairs with somebody or something just as you used to."

Then the aunt looked him over with those keen, kind eyes of hers, a long, scrutinizing gaze, wondering if the last two years of college life in which she had not seen him had made or marred. But she was satisfied with the lines of the pure mouth and the clear eyes which met hers unfalteringly.

"Well, begin," Aunt Crete said briskly, taking a seat on a cushion of pine needles; "tell me all about yourself, quick, for I have not long to stay. I am on my way to Uncle Daniel's to spend the rest of the summer, and shall take the night express from here; so go on!"

"Aunt Crete, do you remember the sunset on the river through that opening in the pines? Look at it now; isn't it glorious?"

"Yes, it is; but I have not time to talk about sunsets. What about yourself? You need not try to turn me off on another track. You are not happy, Wayne; I see it in your eyes."

"Better talk of sunsets, or anything, rather than my miserable affairs," the young man said gloomily; "why rehearse them when we have but a little time together? It will only make you unhappy."

But Aunt Crete was not to be put off; she questioned and cross-questioned until she knew

the whole, putting together what he told and did not tell.

"And why in the world have you not told your father all this long ago?"

"Because he long ago refused to listen to any complaints, and I resolved never to trouble him again on the subject. That fellow represents to father that I am jealous of him; he tells all sorts of lies about me which are believed because I will not condescend to plead with my father to have as much faith in his own son as he has in a stepson."

"He shall know the truth," Aunt Crete said resolutely; "I'll go and tell him myself, this minute. The idea of his suspecting you of such things!"

"Don't you do it, Aunt Crete; he would despise me if he thought I got you to interfere. It would be of no use, either. He is as completely under the influence of that woman and her son as if he were hypnotized. When I'm not in a rage, I'm sorry for father; he has to walk on just such a line, because tears and hysterics are a terror to him. When I discovered that Leon was drinking and running into debt, I thought I ought to tell father for his own sake, but that villain had got his ear first and trumped up a lie about me, as he always does, and father believed it, as he always does; now he must take the consequences; I shall

not tell him. The injustice of his treatment of me is outrageous!"

"The trouble, from the very first," said Aunt Crete, sadly, "has been that miserable Pierson pride. You allowed your father to get wrong impressions, and were silent because you were too proud to explain, when you should have defended yourself."

"I must maintain my self-respect," Wayne said, with his head held high. Aunt Crete sighed, and was silent. At last she spoke half hesitatingly:—

"Wayne, it is sad enough to have you on bad terms with your father, but there is something that troubles me more than that. You said you hated Leon."

"Yes, I said so, and I do; it's the naked truth, and I cannot deny it."

"'He that hateth his brother is a murderer,'" quoted Aunt Crete, solemnly.

"If you knew all that I have suffered from that torment, you would not wonder that I have lost patience. He is perfectly Satanic; he has made my life miserable. I have envied the merest clodhopper who had a happy home! Don't preach forbearance to me; I've got beyond that."

"But a Christian cannot cherish hate."

"I am not a Christian, Aunt Crete. Why did you think I was?"

"I thought so because once upon a time a certain dear boy declared his purpose to love and serve his Lord."

"That boy was lost, long ago, turned into a wretched, prematurely grown-up creature. But don't let's talk of that any more. Time is going, and I must talk to you about my plans. You know I am cast off now. Father said I might consider his aid at an end unless I apologize to Leon! I shall go away from here forever; I am tired of this, anyway."

"Don't think of such a thing!" Aunt Crete said, with energy. "The idea of your going away and leaving everything to that rascal! Have a talk with your father and *make* him understand. He is hasty, I know, and he is in a trying position; but I am sure that he didn't really mean what he said. Don't cut loose from your father. Finish your college course, at least; then your way will be clearer. You can come and live with me then as long as you like in the old homestead. I'll provide the home, and you can provide the bread and butter."

Aunt Crete felt at ease about Wayne's future, because his mother's not small fortune had been willed to her boy; but, by her request, the boy himself was to be kept in ignorance of it until he became of age.

Before Aunt Crete continued her journey that

evening, she secured a promise from Wayne that he would have an explanation with his father that very night. Accordingly, when he returned from accompanying his aunt to the station, he went to the library to fulfil this promise. His father was not there, and there seemed to be an unusual bustle and stir in the house. Jonas presently drove the carriage to the door, and soon his father came downstairs, travelling-bag in hand, and hurriedly explained that he had been summoned to a distant city on important business. As he bade Wayne good-by, he left in his hand a note. Wayne hurried with it to the library and read as follows: —

"DEAR WAYNE: I am compelled to be absent from home, for several days at least. Perhaps I have taken the pranks of college boys too seriously and been unnecessarily harsh with you; so consider, if you please, those last words of mine unsaid. It is true I am distressed that your manhood has not yet overcome and cast out that strange spirit of jealousy that seemed to take possession of you on Leon's first coming to us. It seems to me that he has shown much forbearance. Do try to have things different between you; his generous nature will overlook everything, I am sure. My life out in the world is extremely harassing; if I might

enjoy peace and quiet in my home, it would be an immense relief.

"FATHER."

If Wayne had been humiliated and angry before, he was furious now. What had not that smooth-tongued enemy of his accomplished! It was just as Aunt Crete had said; he had himself been foolishly silent. Now indeed his father should know the truth, if he could possibly get it before him, and he would not go away; he would stay and assert his rights.

He did not know how soon an opportunity would offer.

It was growing late, but still he paced the floor, absorbed in bitter thoughts. Suddenly he was aware of another presence in the room. His stepmother, clad in a white wrapper, stood, ghostlike, in the doorway.

"Wayne," she began haughtily, "what is the meaning of this? Do you know that it is almost twelve o'clock?"

"Well, and what of that?" he asked.

"Are you not aware that the house should be closed by this time?" She began closing and fastening windows as she spoke.

"Excuse me, but I'm not ready to leave this room yet," Wayne answered. "When I am, I will attend to the locks."

Mrs. Pierson looked at the tall young man before her, and swiftly took in the fact that

he was actually no longer a boy. But she was not to be cowed by him; she drew herself up with dignity, and said: —

"I think you forget that I am the mistress of this house, and close it when I please."

"And I think you forget that I am the grown son of the master of this house, and as such have a few rights worthy of respect."

Notwithstanding the masterful air, Mrs. Pierson walked toward the lights as if to turn them out, saying, "It's all nonsense for young people to sit up late, and I don't intend to keep my house open and ablaze with light at this hour, inviting the notice of burglars."

Wayne laughed scornfully. The idea of burglars in that quiet spot where he had spent his life was preposterous. He too came and stood under the chandelier, and there was a silent conflict between the two as they looked into each other's faces.

"And I do not intend to be turned out of the library and sent to bed, as if I were ten instead of twenty, at the command of one who came into this family several years later than I did." Wayne's eyes glowed with excitement as he spoke. His stepmother had the advantage of him, for she remained cool outwardly. She was, in fact, speechless with surprise for a moment. Her stepson had been haughty and cold, but never before had he blazed out like this.

"Indeed!" she said presently; "you must make your conduct match your age, then. Men, that is, *gentlemen*, are courteous to women. I shall not condescend to quarrel with you; but be assured that your father shall hear of this disrespect to me." Whereupon Mrs. Pierson walked majestically out.

In her room and preparing for rest, she called herself a fool that she had managed so miserably. The boy who had suddenly turned into a man, and become her enemy, she might years ago have charmed to her allegiance, even as she did the father.

Wayne Pierson did not sleep well that night. Added to all his other troubles, he had himself to reckon with. At his own tribunal he had been tried and convicted. His stepmother's words held a sting. His standard of what was due from man to woman was extremely high, even chivalric, and it covered him with shame to realize that he had transgressed a law which he particularly prided himself upon observing. He had treated a woman, his father's wife, with discourtesy. There was just one thing to be done: he must apologize. Oh, the misery of going through this ordeal with that icicle of a woman! but there was no other way out. It was no fear of consequences which made him thus decide. He simply could not respect himself, and do otherwise.

The next morning he was up early, going about restlessly, waiting for an opportunity to speak to his stepmother. He wanted it over with, but there were guests in the house, and it was not easy to find her alone; however, after breakfast she happened out on the porch, not knowing that he was there. Wayne came forward eagerly, his hat lifted, and bowing with a grace that Mrs. Pierson had often remarked in him, he said, "I beg your pardon for speaking to you as I did last night; it was very rude, and I should not have forgotten myself so far had I not been greatly incensed over another matter."

His stepmother gazed at him in unqualified surprise. This was a new phase in a young man's character. Wayne had always avoided a direct issue with her, since he had grown older, so there had been no occasion for apology. Her own son was certainly not given to confessions of wrong. What a queer fellow Wayne was! She knew he was not mocking her; his tones and manner were respectful, and his eyes looked sincere. She was not entirely proof against so courteous an apology; for a moment her heart warmed to him; then an ugly feeling that an action so noble condemned her own son turned the scale. He from a child had possessed a lawless tongue, and never dreamed of apologies. She thought

within herself: "Wayne is probably trying to buy me off. He supposes that if he confesses, I will not mention it to his father." When she spoke, after hesitation, her "Certainly" was as cold as if it had frozen on the way out.

During that day a vivid account of the library scene was forwarded to her husband; it had concluded with: "I am really worried about Wayne. He looked perfectly furious. But there — I did not mean to trouble you; of course we must bear with him, and count it one of the means of disciplining our spirits in patience. I am truly sorry for you."

It never seemed to occur to Mrs. Pierson that her husband had aught to complain of in her own son. Mother-love had a mantle broad and long to screen him from eyes severe; but alas for Wayne, whose faults were seen through a magnifying glass.

In the afternoon Wayne took a sudden determination to spend the Sabbath with a friend several miles distant by rail; so he left home soon after luncheon.

He had not been long gone when Leon sauntered out to the stable where the horses of the two young men stood side by side. He began to saddle his own for a gallop, but discovered a loose shoe. Instead of delaying his ride for a little and taking his horse to a near-by blacksmith shop, he laid hold of Wayne's pony.

Then he gave a long, low whistle, a signal with him that he was somewhat perplexed and nonplussed. A slender chain passed about Liph's neck and then through an iron ring in a beam, and was securely fastened with a padlock.

"Aha, my boy! we'll see whether you have got the better of me this time," he muttered, as he ransacked his pockets for keys. It was not the first time that Leon had attempted to ride Liph; but he was so cruel to animals that Wayne would on no account trust his horse to him, and had taken this precaution to make all safe during his absence. He carried one key himself and had provided Jonas, the man of all work, with another.

It was like Leon to be more than ever determined to ride the horse as the difficulties of accomplishing it increased. Jonas was at work in a far-off lot, and the horse could be secured if he could only unlock that padlock, and unlock it he would, somehow or other. He went upstairs and got all the keys that would be likely to fit. At last, a key belonging to an old valise almost opened the padlock. A little filing, then the key turned in the lock, and the horse was free, or rather, he was in bonds to a tyrant.

While Leon saddled him he could not keep the "grin" from his face that the other young man so hated. Very soon he trotted down the

road, well pleased. Liph was the perfection of a saddle-horse, for, added to unusual ease of motion, he was even more fleet and spirited than Leon's own; and the young man had long been manœuvring to secure him for a dash over the country.

The sun was throwing long shadows when Leon came plunging at full speed up the carriage-way; and nobody would have recognized the gentle Liph in this wild-eyed creature with distended nostrils and covered with foam. It happened that Liph's master, not finding his friend at home, had returned by the next train, and at this moment came up the pathway through the grove, amazement, horror, and fury in his face. He was just in time to hear from among the vines about the porch a soft voice with a note of distress in it, exclaim:

"Oh, that poor dear horse!" And Wayne knew that it was not his stepmother's voice.

VI.

Enid.

DURING the last fortnight there had been a guest at Beechwood whose presence had the same effect on the household that a burst of sunshine let into a gloomy room might produce. Not that the inmates of that home were continually warring, but when there is not perfect harmony, the atmosphere is more or less affected by it. The house was often gay with music and laughter and merry guests, who, despite good cheer and abounding hospitality, were conscious of a chill in the intercourse of the family themselves.

Enid Wilmer was the daughter of Mrs. Pierson's dearest friend. Their intimacy, begun in school, had been cemented through the years by correspondence and occasional visits. When ill health obliged Mrs. Wilmer to spend a year at certain springs in Europe, she decided to leave her daughter Enid in the excellent school where she had been a pupil for two years past. Learning of this, Mrs. Pierson petitioned that the young girl be allowed to spend her summer vacation at Beechwood.

"Let your dear girlie come to us," she had written. "We will take the best care of her. Leon is at home, and will be delighted to ride and walk and row with her. Who knows, dear friend, but that it might be the small beginning of an attachment which would fulfil our early dreams that our children should belong to each other? Not, of course, that I would encourage love-making thus early, but it is well to have them acquainted."

Mrs. Wilmer was only too happy to have her daughter in her friend's home during a part of the long separation. There is a type of modern schoolgirl, flippant, irreverent, ill-mannered, which one shudders to encounter until life's experiences and the grace of God have chiselled and polished away insufferable egotisms and vanities. Such was not Enid Wilmer. Indeed, it was a wonder that a nature so sweet and unspoiled should have sprung from the unfriendly soil of wealth and fashion. The families had not met in several years, but Mrs. Pierson had written much of her son, so that Enid quite looked forward to the pleasure of having a sort of brother to go about with her, unless perhaps she should stand too much in awe of so great a paragon as his mother had painted him.

Leon, too, welcomed the thought of a young lady guest for so long a time. When they

met, both were disappointed. Leon's loud, bold ways, and his taking a sort of possession of Enid from the first, not in a brotherly style, either, but as if she were a grown-up young lady, repelled the girl. He darted impressive glances at her from his big black eyes, and rattled off sentimental nonsense mixed with silly compliments. Enid, on the contrary, had thought of herself as not much more than a little girl, and Leon as a nice boy who would be a good comrade to ramble about with her. Leon was amazed that his efforts at flirting met with so little success. When he flashed unutterable things at her from eloquent eyes, her own earnest gray-blue ones gave no answering flash, but gravely regarded him with innocent steadfast look, as if she did not understand such manifestations. When he grew bolder and talked what she called "foolishness," she would promptly take herself out of hearing of his voice, or surprise him by spirited banter, turning his lovemaking into ridicule without mercy. The womanly intuitions even of her brief seventeen years told her it was but hollow talk and mockery.

The "other boy" whom Enid met at mealtimes and occasionally in the evening was a problem to her. Reserved, rather silent, it was difficult to know him; but his grave, kind eyes and courteous manner won Enid's liking,

and what she saw of him belied what she continually heard from his stepmother and Leon. Mrs. Pierson had remarked to her: —

"Yes, every house has its skeleton, only it has flesh and bones in this case. If it were not for Wayne Pierson, we three would be perfectly happy. My husband is devoted to Leon, and we have lovely times when we are alone, but Wayne is a disturbing element, as you will soon discover. He has a sullen, jealous disposition which is like a dark cloud in our home. There is always some difficulty between him and Leon on account of it. His temper carries him to great lengths sometimes. I will admit that Leon is a sad tease, and does aggravate him from pure love of fun. Wayne is one of those fellows who cannot take a joke, sort of wooden, you know, and Leon does love a joke. If it weren't for his merry brightness I don't know what would become of us sometimes. But the chief trouble grows out of Wayne's inordinate jealousy. One reason for that is, that he does not learn so readily as Leon. It is trying, of course, to see Leon so far ahead of him, getting praises and honors and all that sort of thing. The poor fellow has to get his education by the hardest. I don't know how he would come out if it were not for Leon's constant help; but let me tell you how he repays him."

Then followed an account of the story that

Leon had brought home that he had been locked into his room by Wayne in order to prevent his being present at that important closing recitation.

All this did not have the effect on the young girl that might have been supposed. Enid found herself believing, despite it all, in the clear-eyed young man who sat opposite her at table, and she longed to put some brightness into a life that seemed to have so little. She pitied him; and Wayne received many a telegraphic glance of sympathy and good-will from the lovely innocent eyes, which he prized more than he would had he known just what prompted them; no young man likes to be pitied by a girl.

Enid had been at Beechwood long enough to become acquainted with Liph; she had even, one day, enjoyed the privilege of skimming over the country on his back; and she made many a visit to the stable during his master's absence, to take him a dainty bit. So her horror and indignation were almost as great as Wayne's when she saw the jaded creature that Leon brought home after his wild ride. She was in full sympathy, too, with the owner of the beautiful animal in the debate which followed.

"What does this mean? What business had you to take my horse without permission?" Wayne thundered.

Under other circumstances Leon would probably have made an insolent reply; but he knew he had an audience: his mother and Enid were on the porch; so in a smooth calm tone he said: —

"It means, my beloved brother, that I had an important errand at Milburn. My horse had lost a shoe and I could not delay, so I ventured upon your well-known generosity, and took yours, for which I crave your royal highness's pardon."

"You wretch! you brute!" burst from Wayne's lips. "Look at him! he's ruined!" The young man had been obliged to hold himself with a firm hand to keep from seizing the whip and laying it about Leon regardless of consequences.

The rider dismounted leisurely and flung the bridle over the horse's neck, saying, as he did so: —

"There! I was going to take him to his stable and make him as good as new; but not after such abuse."

As usual, Leon appeared to his mother, who had silently listened, to be the injured one; and she said to Enid: —

"There, you can see now what I meant. Did ever any one hear of such a fit of anger over so small a thing! he is always just so mean and disobliging. Poor Leon! it seems

a shame that his home should be made unpleasant by that fellow."

Enid, fearing she could no longer repress her indignation, excused herself and went to her room. A few minutes later, she stole away unperceived, by a roundabout way, to the stable. She stepped back when she reached the door and saw Wayne with his head bowed on the neck of the horse; when he lifted it and began to rub Liph down, Enid walked softly in. She had a basket in her hand containing a bottle of witch-hazel, some soft cloths, and a few lumps of sugar.

"I couldn't help coming to try to do something for poor, dear Liph," she said, coming to the horse's side and patting him. "It was horrid to treat him so. I do believe Leon used spurs, cruel fellow! Liph's great eyes look at you mournfully, as if he wanted to ask: 'Where was my master when this dreadful thing happened to me?'"

If Wayne had seen Enid approaching in the distance he would probably have fastened the stable door, for he wished to be alone with his anger and grief. As it was, he would not trust himself to words. The feelings that surged within him could find no fit expression for innocent ears. He only bowed his head and tried to smile when Enid asked: "May I help you comfort poor Liph?"

He could but smile indeed, when, after she had bathed the wounds made by the spurs, she poured witch-hazel liberally over the linen cloth and washed Liph's face as if he were a human, drying it gently with another cloth. She would have bathed the horse from head to foot in the refreshing lotion had she been allowed to do so. Then she combed and stroked his silky mane, talking fondly to him the while, and plumping lumps of sugar into his mouth. Liph was already looking brighter, and his master had grown calmer, when Enid vanished noiselessly as she had come; though not before she heard, as she went out, a grateful "Thank you ever so much."

It was a great relief to Wayne that he needed to work vigorously for a time, and so expend some of his overwrought feeling. It was most aggravating to have this to bear without hope of redress; but there was no hope except it might be through a hand-to-hand encounter. Possibly in that he might come off victor, for he had grown strong and become a skilled athlete. His lithe slenderness might more than match Leon's stouter proportions; but the thought of seriously entertaining such an idea was abhorrent to him. Never would he descend to measures of that sort unless self-defence made it necessary.

The next afternoon, which was the Sabbath, Enid had established herself in a corner of the porch with a book. Mrs. Pierson lay in a hammock near by, dozing and reading by turns, when Leon came out and asked Enid to go with him for a row on the river.

"Thank you, not to-day," Enid said; "to-morrow, if you choose."

Whereupon Leon struck a theatrical attitude and quoted: —

> "'To-morrow, did'st thou say?
> Go to — I will not hear of to-morrow!
> It is a period nowhere to be found
> In all the hoary registers of time,
> Unless, perchance, in the fool's calendar.'

"But to come down to everyday prose, I shall be away to-morrow."

"Some other day, then," persisted Enid; "I really cannot go to-day, if you will excuse me."

Leon muttered something unintelligible and strode off to a seat under a tree in the distance. His mother watched him uneasily, then, turning to Enid, asked: "Why did you not go, dear? Don't you like the water?"

"Oh, yes, indeed I do, very much, but —" and Enid hesitated, then went bravely on: "I have not been accustomed to going out rowing on the Sabbath. Do you think it is quite right to do so?"

"You dear little Puritan! Why not? What could be quieter than floating about on a peaceful river talking or reading? You can take along all the good books you wish."

"Yes, but," Enid said, with flushing face, "I have lately promised to live to please my Master, the Lord Jesus. I am not sure about this."

"My dear child, your mother and I when we were girls at home spent almost every Sabbath afternoon in summer floating about in a boat on a little lake. It never crossed our minds that we were doing wrong. We turned out to be rather good women, did we not?"

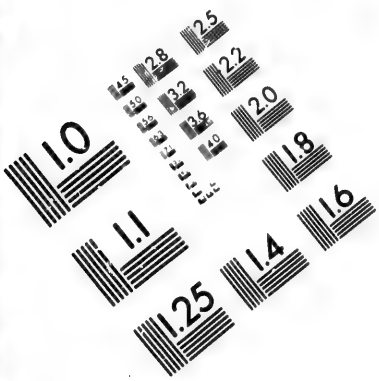
The sarcasm was painful to the sensitive girl, even though it was accompanied by a smile.

"Besides," Mrs. Pierson went on, "I have always supposed that Christian service meant doing good to others. If so innocent a thing as this will keep a young man from attending a ball-game on the Sabbath, where I presume he is planning this minute to go, it would seem that it was certainly right."

While Enid hesitated, Mrs. Pierson said in a softened tone: "We mothers have a good deal of anxious thought about our boys. I hope, dear, if you can find it in your conscience to help me by influencing him for good this afternoon, you will do so."

Poor Enid, in a strait betwixt many oppos-




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ing thoughts, began to feel that at least it might be right to heed the wishes of the woman in whose care she had been placed by her mother. Then, if she could really do good by going, was it not her duty? And yet, with a tenderer conscience and a more logical mind than her hostess, there arose the question: How could she influence another for good when she was by her own standard breaking the Sabbath to accomplish it? The conflict ended by her going down to tell Leon that she had changed her mind and would go with him.

When they were seated in the boat, moving rapidly to long strokes of the oars over the smooth water, Leon noticed that Enid had a book on her lap.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed, trying to spell out the title. "'The — something — Secret!' You're a sly midget; you've brought along a paper-covered novel, — French, too, I dare say. Ah! these demure girls — they're deep!"

"Shall I read to you?" Enid asked, opening the book.

"Oh, yes, of course; I'm always ready for a novel — a good one."

Whereupon Enid began to read the story of a young man who early in life had a vivid realization that he was a soul; that this world was not his permanent home; that just over

a boundary line was the other world to which he was going, and it was everlasting. To Enid the "Christian's Secret of a Happy Life" had lately become more intensely interesting than a novel could possibly be. She forgot her companion as she read on with glowing face, until Leon exclaimed: —

"Excuse me, but how much of that trash do you think my good nature capable of enduring? A 'happy life,' indeed! I know the secret of a happy life; it is to have all the money you want, go where you please, and do what you please. That makes a good time, which of course includes taking a pretty girl out boating; that is, if she isn't poky. See here, seriously, my dear, take my advice and throw that book into the river. That is no sort of reading for you. It will make you into a disagreeable, sanctimonious old maid. If such an unnatural prig of a fellow as that book describes ever lived, he ought to have been tortured until he got some sense."

During this tirade Enid read quietly to herself, as if she did not hear what he was saying.

"Come, now, this isn't very interesting," Leon said, after a silence. "Can't you sing something?"

Enid did not feel in the least like singing. Leon's talk had been an offence to her. But

the remembrance of what had brought her out there made her resolve to pass it over. Her voice was sweet and well trained. It was a pleasure to Leon to hear it, even though it did sing the hymn beginning: —

"When peace like a river attendeth my way."

That finished, she began one of which Leon liked the melody, and he sang with her. When Mrs. Pierson heard Enid's sweet, penetrating notes and Leon's deep bass float to her from the distant water, in the hymn,

"O day of rest and gladness,
Most beautiful, most bright!"

she smiled and congratulated herself.

Enid was on the alert to forestall Leon's selections, and she glided into another song as soon as one was finished. But in the midst of a strain he suddenly broke out in a secular sentimental song which had not even merit to commend it. Of course Enid did not sing with him. That vexed him, and snatches of all the foolish songs that floated through his memory were given. Then college songs, uproarious and bordering on coarseness, were shouted out, while he enjoyed to the utmost Enid's troubled face. She begged him to stop, but he only

laughed and sang the louder. Then she grew indignant, and told him he was rude; and his reply was: —

"My! but you look pretty when you're vexed."

VII.

A Fateful Letter.

BY this time the rising tide had changed the smooth surface of the water, and the sky had begun to darken.

"You must turn about at once," Enid said, glancing at the threatening clouds.

"Must! Indeed! Nobody says 'must' to me. Say, 'Please take me home, that's a dear,' and I'll do it."

But the girl was silent. It began to dawn on her tormentor that she was really becoming frightened. Here was a fine opportunity to tease, and to bring down Miss Enid's dignity at the same time. It would be delicious, he told himself, to see her with tearful face, begging him to protect her. When a distant roll of thunder was heard he examined the sky with mock anxiety, then swiftly turned the boat about as if they were in great danger, and he rowed with mad haste till the boat reared and plunged like a living thing. It was on the verge of upsetting several times, and the water dashed in over Enid, who, though pale with

fear, held a strong rein over herself, resolved that Leon should not be gratified by one beseeching look. She knew that all this tossing about was unnecessary, and it roused her indignation. The instant the boat grated on the sands she sprang out. Leon clutched at her arm to detain her, but she broke away and ran swiftly up the hill.

For once Leon was checkmated; he had meant to make it all up with her on the homeward walk. The rest of the fun would be to see her beautiful eyes look forgiveness into his own. The path that led to the pine woods was hidden from Leon's view by a bend in the road, and Enid turned in here, thinking to escape him.

Wayne was accustomed to go to his green retreat on Sabbath afternoons with his Bible, to keep up a boyish practice, and worship in this quiet place — not his Lord, but the memory of his mother. He went over then the chapters they used to read together, recalling some of her dear words. Perhaps the seed thus sown would yet blossom and bear fruit.

He was amazed that afternoon to see Enid rush suddenly in between the tree-trunks, throw herself down at the foot of one, and burst into a paroxysm of weeping. Evidently she thought herself alone. He must let her know to the contrary, but he hesitated to interrupt those tears. It must do one good to

cry like that; however, he rose and went toward her. When Enid heard the crackling twigs, she started up as if to run, but, seeing Wayne, sank down again, covering her face with her hands.

"I'm glad it's you," came a muffled voice, presently, "and not that — that torment! I know you must think me very silly to cry at this rate, but I have got going and can't stop."

"What has happened? Why! you are wet; what can I do for you?" Wayne asked all in a breath.

"Nothing, thank you," she said, putting back her stray locks; "I shall run up to the house in a minute, when there is no danger of being overtaken. The wet will not hurt me, and nobody can do anything, anyway; I must endure it while I stay. Oh, that disagreeable fellow!" A sympathetic listener was a temptation, and Enid gave an account of the trials of the afternoon, adding: "But after all I am troubled most at my own self. I ought not to have gone on Sunday. And then I got so fearfully angry at Leon — I didn't know before that I could hate anybody."

"The brute!" Wayne exclaimed; "he ought to be—" Just then the pine boughs parted and Leon's dark face looked in. He had heard Wayne's last remark, and guessed who was meant.

"You puppy!" he roared, shaking his fist in Wayne's face; "I'll teach you to interfere in my affairs. Get out of here, or I'll put you out!"

Wayne's answer was a look from bright, resolute eyes, as he braced himself against a huge tree. He was not averse to punishing Leon for abusing his horse if it could be done in self-defence, so he waited.

Leon made a bound toward him and put out a hand, but Enid sprang between them.

"Don't!" she cried; "strike me, if you must strike."

Leon gazed for an instant at the slender girl with her glowing face and white robes, admiring her in spite of himself, then he laughed sneeringly and motioned her aside. At this moment, however, footsteps and voices were heard drawing near. The storm had gone round, the sun was shining, and Mrs. Pierson with a stranger was seen approaching.

Enid fled at once, and Wayne stepped behind a large tree.

"Leon, dear," his mother said, "this is Judge Kemp, your father's old friend, who has kindly stopped on his way North, to see us. We are in search of you to walk with us to the beach." A fortunate interruption, for both young men were in the mood for a conflict.

The next morning's mail brought a letter to Wayne which pleased him. It was an invitation from a college friend to spend the summer with him at his father's summer home in the mountains. This was exactly to Wayne's mind; his friend was most congenial, and the visit would take him away from the place that was becoming intolerable. He would have gone almost anywhere, though, until the opening of college. A letter asking his father's approval was despatched at once; and the reply came in a few cold words, saying that, if he could not treat his mother with respect, his absence in the home was certainly more to be desired than his presence. The father, it will be remembered, received an account of his son's offence, but not of the apology. To do Mrs. Pierson justice, though, her conscience afterward made her promise to tell him when he should come home.

Wayne waited only to place Liph under the care of his former owner, and one bright summer morning set off on his journey almost light-hearted; he was disappointed, though, in not seeing Enid to bid her good-by. It was quite early, but she often got out for a run before breakfast; and now he caught a glimpse of her in the distance, seeming in her green dress and cap like a part of the shrubbery.

"I never before had the pleasure of meet-

ing the dryad who presides over this wood in her very temple," Wayne said, as he drew near, with a knightly bow.

"That is only because you don't get up early enough. She is often around at sunrise." Then more seriously, Enid said: "I shall be gone when you come back. How nice it would be if you were to stay and somebody else were to go. I have been wanting to speak to you alone ever since Sunday, and tell you how much I liked to have you plant yourself against that tree and stand firm when ordered off your own grounds. It was splendid."

"And I have wanted to see you to tell you how grateful I am that you risked your life to save my own."

They both laughed then, a merry, care-free laugh, such as Wayne seldom indulged in. The young man reached and broke a small sprig from a tall cedar, saying, as he handed it to Enid: —

"Keep that till I see you again, — I wonder when it will be, — and believe that my friendship for you is like this tree, fragrant and perennial. Now can't I have a keepsake?"

Enid knew where a stray rosebush hid itself, and she disappeared a moment, returning with a lovely wild rose. Wayne placed it in his coat. Then they shook hands and he was gone. The wood-nymph went her way feeling lonely.

Leon Hamilton had not the habit of liquor drinking so fixed upon him that he used it daily; as yet he indulged only at intervals, or when tempted by dissolute associates. This being the case, it was easy through that summer to delude his stepfather into believing that his habits were correct. A safety-valve was afforded him by short absences, when he went on what he called "a lark," returning apparently as usual. He improved every opportunity in Wayne's absence to strengthen Mr. Pierson's belief in him; to stand high in his regard was worth working for. Who could tell but that if he manœuvred wisely, the greater part of the estate would fall to him? Therefore it was as if the young man's character hastened to throw on a mask at the approach of his stepfather; each day he welcomed him smilingly, as if his home-coming was what he most longed for. He read up the daily news for no other reason but to be companionable to this man of affairs, and nothing could exceed his delicate thoughtfulness; he was ever on the alert to perform some service, and so cheerfully that it was a pleasure to receive a favor from him.

As a consequence the atmosphere of home was delightful to the tired man, whose life went on its busy way, be it summer or winter, and he was wont to sigh when con-

trasting his silent, reserved son with this, his other son.

It was unfortunate that circumstances had seemed always to conspire to aid the young man in the course of deception which had now become second nature. Years before, he had overheard Wayne's father tell him that he should listen to no complaints; this and Wayne's silence had encouraged him in lawless conduct, carefully concealed from the father. The present summer, too, was no exception. Enid had too much delicacy of feeling to hint by word or look to her host and hostess that her visit was made intolerable by Leon's insolence and tyranny. She simply cut it short as soon as possible.

Autumn found the young men in their accustomed places in the university. Wayne, refreshed by his outing, prepared to enter upon the year's study with zeal. Like most earnest souls, when starting afresh, he had fortified himself by many resolves. He would try to curb the fierce anger which Leon's insolence always awakened. He would hold himself so high above his persecutions that they would cease to annoy. It was only a year; then he should cut loose from his father's house forever. The thought of trying to make his stepbrother different never crossed the young man's mind. It would have seemed to him like changing

Ethiopian skins and leopard spots. It is Christians only who have love enough and faith enough to dare hope for such. He also decided that it was useless to try to enlighten his father as to Leon. A wall of prejudice, strong and high, was in the way. Perhaps, too, Leon had learned his lesson, and it would not be necessary.

Scarcely a month had passed, however, when the attention of the faculty was again called to the same clique of disorderly students who had annoyed them the year before. They determined to break up this state of affairs, and had been cautiously watching and taking notes of certain men who supposed their midnight revellings had been carried on with great secrecy. Leon had joined himself to the wild set, and was one of those who received a reprimand and warning.

It so happened one Friday that Leon reached home just as the mail arrived; he received it, and looked over the letters. There was one that startled him. It was in the peculiar upright handwriting of the dean of the university, and was addressed to his stepfather. This was suspicious just at this time, and boded no good to himself. He quickly slipped it into his pocket, placing the others on the tray which stood on a hall table. Hurrying to his room, he carefully opened the envelope, slipped out

the letter, and read what brought a deeper flush to his face, and called forth that long, low whistle of his, a sign that he was in what he would have called "a hole." The paragraph which was of chief interest to him read: —

"We regret to inform you that your son Leon is not applying himself to study as he should. We fear, too, that he is forming habits of dissipation. Possibly a word from you, joined to the admonition he has already received, may make an impression for good. We trust so; for the suspension of a young man so bright and attractive, especially one connected with yourself, would give us much pain. For your son Wayne, on the contrary, we have nothing but praise; he is an honor to our institution, and a young man of much promise in every way."

Leon knit his brows in perplexity over this letter; his first thought was to destroy it. But of what use would that be? Another could be sent in its place — though of course he should be more careful in future, and not give those old donkeys a chance to pry into his affairs; of turning squarely about and being different he had no intention. Suddenly there flashed into his mind a plan. This letter might be so managed that it would actually serve his own interests instead of condemning him. And yet he hesitated. He did not intend to be

wholly bad; his falsehoods were often inconsequent talk which one might take seriously or otherwise; but to tamper with the mail was, even to his irresponsible nature, not a light matter. Still, it would be an excellent opportunity to pay off some grudges toward Wayne, and also aid perhaps in what he had wished for so long, which was an open rupture between father and son, ending in Wayne's leaving home. Then he should have no spy upon his actions.

It should be done. Without further hesitation he carefully erased the two names; then as carefully — and he was skilled in the imitation of handwriting — substituted Wayne for Leon and Leon for Wayne. Even then there was a risk in letting it go; his stepfather might go up to the university and have an interview with the faculty, then the truth would come out — he had no fears because of altering the letter, that would naturally be charged to a slip of the writer's pen. However, there were risks anyway. That sharp-eyed dean might swoop down upon them at Beechwood. Then what? However, knowing father and son as he did, the chances were that it would bring on a fracas, and there would be no interview with the dean; Mr. Pierson was too busy and too proud. The matter decided, he resealed the letter and returned it to its place on the tray,

biding his time, not without much uneasiness, it must be confessed.

Wayne had not been unaware, during the month, of Leon's conduct, and a report had come to him within a day or two that large sums of money had been put up by him at the gaming-table. Wayne's conscience troubled him. What if his father had been unjust to him; he could not retaliate, — not upon father, whose head was growing gray, — he must and would tell him of Leon's misdoings at once.

Mr. Pierson was in the habit of deferring the opening of his evening mail until after dinner, when he retired to the quiet of the library, where he was left undisturbed an hour or two. He had not been long there on the evening the dean's letter was received, when Wayne came in, saying, "Father, can I speak with you a few minutes?"

His father looked at him coldly, making no answer. Wayne shut the door, came over to a seat near him, and began: —

"Father, as long as I was the only one to suffer I have been silent regarding Leon Hamilton, but now that your own interests are in danger, I must speak." He told his story then in as few words as possible, while the father gazed at him in utter amazement, interrupting him at last, and in a voice hoarse with anger exclaimed: —

"And you expect me to believe all this!

What duplicity! — and a son of mine! It is a most likely story, sir, that you would not have informed me long ago had this been true. It is simply a plot to divert suspicion from yourself. I have abundant proof that you are the guilty one." The father almost groaned out the last words, while the veins stood out like cords on his forehead.

It was Wayne's turn to sit stupefied with horror and surprise. Before he could speak again his father said, in a voice that Wayne scarcely recognized: —

"Leave me alone." The son tried to protest, but his father waved him away with an imperative — "Go!"

Then the door was locked after him, and the strong man bowed his head in grief such as he had known but once before in his life.

How could it be that his boy had come to this! Was it his father's fault? Had he been unfaithful to his high trust? The back years came and passed in review like a panorama; his mistakes were sharply outlined. He seemed to see again the boy's mother, as she lay dying that summer morning, lift pleading eyes to his face, and murmur with her last breath, "Be gentle with our boy" — the boy's eyes were like hers. No, he had not been gentle, he had been harsh and impatient; his son had been unhappy; and he had not cared. It was too late now. The

years had made their record, the books were closed, and the boy was as he was.

There was no sleep for Wayne that night. The time he had thought a year away had come. He must go. Before midnight his trunk was packed, and all arrangements for a sudden departure completed. That done, he went out for a last visit to the woods. The moon shone solemnly down into the still place, still but for the murmured song of a wakeful bird.

As Wayne stood and took a silent farewell, he heard footsteps, and there in the open moonlit space was his father, walking back and forth with bowed head — no sleep for him either. And then to the watching son there came a flood of tenderness, a remnant of boyish fondness, and he rushed out — the anger gone from his heart — crying: "Father, father! There is some terrible mistake! Can't we love each other again? What can I do to —"

"You can take yourself out of my sight," came in a loud, angry tone from the father. There! It was out! — and he had meant to try to be forgiving — but "the boy" was gone. Gone indeed, a few minutes later, for he stepped upon the night express and was borne swiftly away.

VIII.

The "Upper Deestrict."

THOUGH he should live to be a hundred years old, Wayne Pierson believed that he could never experience a more utter sense of desolation than took possession of him that night when he boarded the midnight train, stumbled over grips and handbags into a seat, and drew his hat down to conceal his face as much as possible. He believed that his brain was clear, but in reality it was in a whirl. His thoughts ran riot about one point. It had come! he was homeless, friendless, alone! He had imagined such an experience more than once; gone over, indeed, every slightest possibility of that way, but always, he knew now, with an undertone conviction that it would never come to him. Why should Wayne Pierson, the only son of a man whom he often of late years heard spoken of as the most eminent lawyer in the state, ever be homeless and friendless? Yet here he was, deserted! His getting ready had been done in a maze. He had packed his trunk, it is

true; but if it had not been pitiful it would have been amusing, the things that went into it. Most of his everyday needs were at the university, whither he had carried them by degrees through the years, always taking from home a full valise and bringing it back nearly empty. Yet when one is going to leave home for good, one must of course take one's trunk, so he packed it. There were books, of course; Wayne Pierson never went anywhere without books; he made no effort to choose, but swept in those that happened to be lying about his room. There was also a pile of old music, selected in the same way. Then there followed miscellaneous articles. A small box containing relics of a Noah's Ark that had been dear to his childhood; most of the animals were maimed, and part of the ark itself was missing. The young man could not have told why he packed it, but the fact remains that while he mechanically tossed in any articles of clothing that his eyes happened to fall upon, and made no attempt to plan for that or the coming season, he deliberately climbed to the highest shelf of his full closet and brought down that Noah's Ark and packed it with some care. There was also the little box containing the bit of ribbon and the half-worn gloves and the dust of a flower or two that his mother's hands had touched; there was a pho-

tograph of his father, taken for his mother but a little while before she went away; an excellent picture of Aunt Crete, the only photograph she could ever be persuaded to sit for; and there were half a dozen pictures of his mother, representing her when she was a fair, girlish bride, then a mother with her baby in her arms, then a matron with the halo of a coming glory already foreshadowing her face, and with a pale, solemn-eyed boy clinging to her. These were carefully selected, but the other things merely happened.

He had packed his trunk, but it had all seemed unreal. Even when he called Jonas and directed that the trunk be taken to the station for the midnight express, and Jonas had answered with his usual respect, "Yes, sir; and where will I check it to, Mr. Wayne?" he had been dazed. He had looked at Jonas as one in a dream, and repeated mechanically, "Check?"

"Yes, sir," said Jonas; "will I check it for you? Have you got your ticket, Mr. Wayne?"

"Oh," said Wayne, trying to rouse himself to the occasion, "never mind the check, Jonas, I will be down there to see to it." But he had not seen to it; the baggageman at the station, who of course knew all the Piersons, had done it for him.

"You're too late to check, sir," he had said, hurrying up, "the check office isn't open here for the night train; but I'll mark your trunk for you and have it put on, and it will be all right. You're going up to town, I suppose?"

"No," said Wayne, speaking with a sharpness that startled himself; "I'm not going to town, that is, I'm not going to stop; mark it for — for Chicago." It was the only name he could recall. The baggage-master looked bewildered.

"You can't do anything of that kind, you know," he said, looking closely at Wayne — and when he thought it over afterward, he muttered to himself, "If it had been the other one, I should think he had had a drop too much, but that isn't this one's stamp. — I can't be sure of the trunk without a check farther than the Junction."

"Oh, very well," said Wayne, "mark it 'the Junction,' then, it doesn't signify." It seemed to him such a trivial matter how his trunk was marked or what became of it. He was in no clearer frame of mind when the conductor touched his arm and demanded a ticket.

"Ticket?" he said vaguely, "I have no ticket."

"Well, sir," said the conductor, sharply, "what are you going to do about it? Am I to put you off the train?"

Then Wayne forced himself to attend to business. He explained that he had not had time to buy his ticket, and mentioned Chicago again as the place toward which he was travelling; and was informed that he could pay as far as the Junction, which they reached soon after daylight, and there he would better get off and buy a ticket.

Wayne vaguely remembered that his friend, the baggage-master, had said something about the Junction, and agreed to this plan. Then he settled himself for a night of misery. A whole lifetime of pain could be lived through between midnight and daylight; and who should have miserable thoughts if not one who had just cut himself loose from all that had heretofore been his life? He leaned his head against the car window, drawing his hat still further over his face, and prepared to go over the bitter story of his wrongs. And then, in less than five minutes, he went into one of the soundest sleeps he had ever taken in his life. He was young, remember, and the day had been filled with strains of one sort and another, culminating in that latest one which had seemed to benumb all his faculties.

When the baggageman had asked him if he wanted a sleeper, he had smiled bitterly as he said briefly, "No, I don't." Nothing had seemed more improbable than that he should

do any sleeping that night. Yet when the conductor shook his arm, and shouted in his ear, he opened his eyes to discover that it was broad daylight.

"Here you are, sir, at the Junction; if you want the Chicago train, you will have to step lively. That's it on the south track."

The young man managed to get himself off the car, and to bring with him his grip and overcoat; but he stood quite still and let the Chicago train pull out of the station. Why should he go to Chicago? Still, he must go somewhere. He felt almost more bewildered than he had the night before, and he also felt humiliated to think that he had been sleeping; although, if he could have realized it, that was perhaps the most sensible thing he had done during the twenty-four hours just past.

Across the road from him was a hotel, and people from various trains were crowding in for breakfast. Something reminded Wayne that he had had no dinner the night before, and he followed the crowd. A chance to wash and brush, followed by a good breakfast, restored his wits somewhat; and when he saw by the schedule that the next train via the "Great Northwestern road" left in fifteen minutes, he resolved to take it. He had always intended to see the great West sometime, why not now?

All day he rode, going out with the crowd for dinner and for supper, and accepting the kindly offer of a vacant berth in the over-crowded sleepers.

"Lucky my friend didn't show up," said the friendly stranger who had offered it; "if he had, you'd have had to sit up all night; there's an awful crowd on board."

Wayne, although he had such important matters of his own to think about, nevertheless took time to wonder who the friend was, and why he had not "shown up." Had he, possibly, been going away from home for good, and had something happened to make it all unnecessary? He had arranged a probable chain of circumstances for him, and was becoming deeply interested in the plot, when he pulled himself up sharply and mentally called himself a fool for allowing his mind to interest itself with childish imaginings instead of giving himself to the serious business of life.

He did not sleep so well that night as he had the night before, despite the berth that dozens of weary, less fortunate travellers envied him. His benefactor just below him snored distressfully, and the air of the car, or rather the lack of air, was torture to Wayne's sensitive nerves. So it was a very much jaded traveller who looked gloomily at life, upon the second

morning of his journey, and tried to determine what should be done next.

It was folly for him to go on in this way; besides being monotonous in the extreme, the process was making great strides through his pocket-book. A young man who was henceforth to support himself must think of such things. Years ago, — a hundred years ago it seemed to him, — when he was a small boy, he had imagined a state of things that pleased him. "When I am a man," he had said, "some day, I mean to take fifty dollars and go to the station and get on the first train that comes, and ride, and ride, until it is all gone, and then see where I will be and how I shall feel."

He had laughed much over this conceit and argued with his mother as to his probable feelings. Behold, here he was almost realizing that childish plan! What with meals, and sleeper, and tickets, he had spent not so very much less than the fifty dollars already; and if he did not feel "of all men most miserable," it was difficult for him to imagine greater trouble than his own.

Still it was time to think connectedly, and he set himself about it. There was no use in trying to go over the weary story again, he had been at that all night. His enemy had conquered him somehow; he could not understand it, there was a mystery about it, and

probably there always would be; but the fact was plain enough that his father had been entirely alienated from him. That woman and her son had accomplished what they had been trying, from the first. His father had told him, practically, that he was a villain, and that he had been plotting all the while to cover his own guilt at the expense of his stepbrother! And then, finally, when out of the fulness of his heart, he had made that last cry for confidence, his father had ordered him out of his sight! What could have been meant, in view of all that had passed before this, but that he was to go permanently? It was not the *going*, the poor fellow told himself as he wiped the perspiration from his forehead; life at home had become anything but pleasant to him; he had meant, very soon, to relieve his father of his presence; but the manner of the going, like a disowned reprobate, was terrible.

The day was heavy with clouds, and the air was chill with the sense of a coming storm; other men were buttoning their coats closer about them and examining the heating apparatus at their feet; but Wayne wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and his sensitive blood seemed at fever heat. No, he would *not* go all over it again. He would never, if possible, *never*, so long as he lived, think of that prince of villains again. If he could kill him and thus

rid the earth of a wretch who ought not to live, there might be some excuse for thinking of him; but since he was powerless, let him not pollute his mind with such a memory. It was in that way that he tried to dismiss his step-brother from his life.

Now what was he to do? He wished to have himself distinctly understand that he had by no means run away from home, like the bad boy in the story book; his lip curled in sarcasm over the thought, and he drew himself up with sad dignity. It was not that, by any means: he had been ordered away! As soon as he was definitely settled and at work, he should of course write to his father and explain the step he had felt himself compelled to take, — thus much was due his position as a gentleman, — but he would distinctly decline any further assistance from his father and make what way he could by himself. His broken college course, so near the end, and with the end in view so full of expected honors, was a very bitter portion of his cup. He had meant to endure until he should graduate; but his father had himself made this impossible, so he tried to put that part of his life away as something that was beyond his control. Only, he told himself proudly, that he should graduate. It would not be with his class; and the class honors, that he

knew they had been preparing to lavish upon him, would be given to another; there would be delay, but some day he should graduate, and from that very college. His father should see, if he cared to see, what the world thought of the son whom he had cast off so easily.

The funds with which to do all these great things, the young man meant to earn. For several years he had been telling himself that he believed he was intended for a teacher, and down deep in his heart had been an ambition to sometime become a college President. Assuredly he had not meant to begin his work by teaching a district school, but he had the sense to see that for an undergraduate, friendless and alone, even a district school might be hard to secure. Meantime, he must live. He took out his pocket-book and carefully estimated his resources.

When he left home he had a hundred dollars in his pocket, and he knew that there was something over fifty placed to his credit at the bank; his father had been very liberal with his allowance, and he was simple in his tastes and so studious in his habits that the surplus had accumulated. But the long reckless journey had already lessened the sum alarmingly to one who had never before been compelled to count costs. He took out his watch and examined it carefully with a new interest. He

knew that it was very valuable, "too valuable for a boy to carry," his father had said with an indulgent smile when he handed it to him. "It cost two hundred dollars, my boy; but your grandfather decreed that you were to have it on your sixteenth birthday, so here it is."

The grandfather was gone now, his mother's father, and Wayne had meant to keep the watch forever. He meant to still, but he told himself, his eyes suddenly dimming while he gazed at it, that if real necessity should arise, he could sell it for awhile, at least, until he was able to buy it back. Meantime, of course, he could get something to do to earn his living; if not teaching, why then—shovelling snow, or whatever was to be had; and he set his lips firmly, making lines in his face that his stepmother would have said "indicated the Pierson obstinacy," and resolved that he *would* succeed.

He got off, toward the close of the day, at a little station where the train seemed to be unaccountably delayed, and for very weariness walked about in front of the little hotel, and wondered if it would be wise to pass another night on the train, or whether he ought to stop at once and go to work at something. His fifty dollars would soon be gone, and he knew now, without further experiment, just how he should feel.

Two men held up the decaying pillars of the hotel porch and chatted together.

"What they going to do for a teacher up there at the upper deestrict?"

"I d'no; find another, I s'pose. That fellow gave them the slip nice, didn't he? Bad time, too; school ought to have took up three weeks ago or more. Here it is the first of November! But you see they couldn't do nothing till Squire Willard got home, and he didn't come till last night. Now they'll look around lively for another, I s'pose."

"What school is that?" It was Wayne's voice that asked the question. The man leaning against the nearest post turned and surveyed him carefully from head to foot, before he made answer.

"It's the upper deestrict, stranger; the big red schoolhouse about a mile from here, along the north pike. They had a man teacher all hired, and he give 'em the slip at the last minute; *after* the last minute, you may say. They waited for him and didn't hear nothing from him for most a week after school had ought to commenced; waited for him every day, you know; and all the time he didn't mean to come at all. So now they're out."

Wayne turned suddenly and sprang back into the train, just in time to secure overcoat and hand bag. He had resolved to look into matters at the "upper deestrict."

IX.

"*I might be a Fool.*"

"HM," said Squire Willard, with the doubtful, somewhat perplexed accent, "I dunno, I declare; it is a kind of a risk, especially as you are so young and haven't had experience, and come without references, as one may say. Still, your references are extra good. I believe in a college education myself, and I mean my boy shall have one. I am a self-made man, but every one cannot succeed in that way. Well, I don't deny that we are in a kind of a fix. School ought to have taken up more than a month ago, and the assistant teacher — have you seen the assistant teacher? Well, she's as smart as a new whip; but then she's young, too, and being well known here it comes hard for her in some ways; your being a perfect stranger will help; but we've got a tough lot of boys. Do you think you could manage them?"

"I should certainly make an effort to do so," Wayne said, trying to speak with the dignity

befitting at least thirty years. "I may not be so young as you fancy; some people retain their youthful appearance longer than others."

"That's so; you don't look a day older than seventeen or eighteen, now that's a fact; but I presume you are older, being you were on your last year in college. Pity you had to stop. Funds give out? I thought likely; well, it isn't every young man who has a father to push him through."

"No," said Wayne, "it isn't. I should like to undertake the work here if you care to have me. If I don't succeed, it will be easy to dismiss me; and I think you will find that my professors in college will vouch for my character and scholarship."

"Well, the fact is there isn't time to wait and see what they would say; but I've no doubt it would be all right; you don't look like a deceiving young man. Well, Mr. — what did you say your name was? Oh, yes, Pierson. I've a great mind to give you a trial. Our young folks are getting very restive. Sarah Jane — that's the assistant — threatened to open school herself if I didn't stir about and get some one. Fact is, they all depend on me, and when I'm away things don't go. I've been away for nearly a month. I believe I'll risk it and give you a trial; here it is Friday again! School ought to begin

Monday, without fail. Well, go in, young man, and see what you can make of it."

Squire Willard was certainly fond of that word "well"; Wayne could scarcely repress a smile over its constant and meaningless repetition. He was astonished, however, at the celerity with which the business was despatched, once the great man's mind was made up. Within the next hour he found himself the duly appointed head of the school, which even the Squire spoke of as the "upper deestrict." Not only that, but he was directed where to find a boarding-house, and given the key to the school building that he might explore it at his leisure. When he ventured to express a doubt as to the propriety of moving so rapidly, the Squire interrupted him with: —

"Oh, there'll be no trouble about that. I'll call the committee together to-night and go through the form; but you needn't wait for that. Just go ahead and make all your arrangements and consider yourself hired. Fact is, they all do as I say; no need for more than me on the committee, for none of the others are willing to stir unless I tell 'em to. You just go down to Isaiah Thompson's and tell 'em you want the teacher's room, and you will be all right. Oh, they'll take you fast enough; teacher always boards there; Isaiah is Sarah Jane's father, you see, so it will be handy for

you and her to fix things up. Isaiah Thompson is a blacksmith; he isn't an educated man, but he's a good, honest blacksmith, and there ain't a better girl in town than Sarah Jane. She's made good use of what chances she's had, and although she has only the little ones to teach, they do say that there ain't a boy in the school who can puzzle her in arithmetic. You may want her to take hold with some of the big scholars if you get in a tight place. She's great on grammar, too, Sarah Jane is. Well, Mr. Pierson, or Professor Pierson, I s'pose I must call you now; sounds queer, don't it? Still, I believe in it. They do it altogether at Westover. That's our nearest city, and a smart, thriving one it is; only fifteen miles away from us. We want our youngsters trained in all the city ways; give 'em the *best* is my motto. Well, Mr. — Professor Pierson, I'm in something of a hurry this morning, and I presume you are, since you have to set up housekeeping to-day, as it were. I've got a pile of letters and accounts to go over. Drop in and see me whenever you feel like it, and when you want advice about the school or anything, don't hesitate to let me know."

Whereupon, Wayne asked for and received minute directions how to find the blacksmith's house and walked away, his mind a curious

mixture of amusement and indignation. Life was certainly pushing him this morning! An hour ago a houseless stranger, now the duly appointed head of a public school with a boarding place and an assistant ready to receive him! The indignation was because of the utter recklessness of this great man, Squire Willard, in thus trusting the interests of the boys and girls of his town to an utter stranger, without waiting even to learn whether any of the statements he had made concerning himself were true.

"I might be a fool," he told himself indignantly, "or worse; I might be a villain for all he knows, and he is willing to let his own children come immediately under my influence, and to place that immaculate 'Sarah Jane' in my immediate care! Or am I in hers, I wonder?" Then amusement got the uppermost, and he laughed outright.

It proved to be a busy morning. The irresponsible young traveller had secured his overcoat and bag, but had allowed his trunk to go to the point for which it was checked, fifty miles or so away. He must go to the station and make arrangements to have it returned to him. Since this remarkable village was willing to adopt a stranger, and in five minutes make a "professor" of him, there seemed to be nothing to do but accept the situation. The trunk planned for, he sought Isaiah Thompson's

small plain red house, and was received by a fat motherly looking woman who waddled about with pleased alacrity to show him the room, saying, "I want to know!" to his brief explanation that he was the new teacher. By this time he felt that he must find a spot where he could be, not only quite out of sight, but out of the hearing of curious ears; so depositing his bag, and learning the hour for supper, he explained that he had taken a late breakfast and should want no dinner; then he made a dash for the nearest woods and tramped about until he was physically exhausted; then he sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree and buried his face in both hands.

What had he done, this creature of impulse? Placed a thousand miles between himself and his home, his college, all his old life! Practically run away, however much he might sneer at the idea and curl his lip over the story books. In what respect was his action better than those of the young fools about whom he had read in his very early boyhood, and for whom he had felt always a wholesome contempt? It is true he would soon be twenty-one and his own master; but did a self-respecting young man of twenty-one care particularly about being his own master? Given the fact that he was a decent fellow with a decent home, and a reasonably good father, had he not as a

rule learned by that time to appreciate both? It is true that his father had spoken bitter words to him, had, in fact, ordered him from his sight. But was it presumable that he meant him to go away from home? On the contrary, was he not, probably at that very hour, worried and distressed because of his absence? There had been some misunderstanding; that contemptible wretch, who had been his hidden enemy since the first day they had met, had succeeded in concocting some scheme that he did not understand, and that had for the time deceived his father; but of course the truth would come out, sooner or later; and if he had been a man, instead of a silly, impatient, reckless boy, he would have stayed patiently and studied out the trouble, and borne the thousand petty trials of his everyday life, and *compelled* his father to understand the mistake he was making.

There was no getting away from the conclusion that he had been a fool. He had given his stepmother a chance to tell all her friends, with the air of meek regret which she knew so well how to assume, that "that passionate boy's ungovernable temper had gotten the better of him once more, and he had actually run away from college! his poor father was nearly distracted. Oh, she did not pretend to know the details, some college troubles, such as young

fellows of his stamp were always getting into; this was evidently worse than usual, however, for Wayne had been unable to stay and face it, and they really did not know where he was gone!"

The young "professor" on the fallen tree ground his teeth and stamped his foot in impotent rage as he thought of all these things, and realized what opportunities he had given his enemies. If he had only waited, and gone quietly, openly; if it had finally seemed best for him to go away; but to rush away in the midnight and leave no word with anybody! What were even his friends to think of such conduct?

It was a pale, worn, miserably depressed youth who emerged at last, toward the close of that eventful Friday, and made his way to his stuffy little room.

Mrs. Thompson would have been aggrieved could she have known that the word "stuffy" was applied to her spare chamber. She had done her best to make it inviting. Her blue and white "counterpane" was on the bed, her brightest piece of rag carpeting was on the floor, and the white muslin curtains at the windows had been washed and ironed and darned by Sarah Jane's own thrifty hands.

Mother Thompson could not know that the room looked to its occupant about the size

of the storeroom at home, and that he had never before seen a counterpane and did not admire this one. He noticed the muslin curtains only to push them wrathfully out of his way as he jerked up both small paned windows and muttered that they were the size of the hen-coop windows at home. Then he felt of the puffy bed and uttered a single dismayed word, "Feathers!" His tone and manner Mrs. Thompson would not in the least have understood.

There was time for no more discoveries, for he was summoned to the tea table. Being hungry, at last, he thought he had responded with promptness, but the business of eating had already commenced when he reached the dining room. Two men, both in their shirt-sleeves, were engaged in shovelling down — in Wayne's estimation no other term would have fitted the act — great mouthfuls of potato and turnip warmed up together.

"How d' do?" said Isaiah, nodding his great black head as Wayne entered. "You're the new teacher, I reckon. Excuse us, we was in an uncommon hurry to-night, Jim and me was. This is Jim Hotchkiss, and your name is — what, now? I've got a mighty poor memory for names. Oh, yes, Pierson. Mis' Thompson I reckon you have seen before. Set right down and make yourself at home; we all

feel uncommonly at home at this table, don't we, Jim?

"You must be pretty hungry by this time," continued the genial host, heaping poor Wayne's plate high with the obnoxious potato and turnip. "Didn't want no dinner, mother said. Homesick a little, I reckon. That ain't no discredit to a boy who's gone away from a good home. Come fur? Good land! A thousand miles! What ever possessed you?"

What, indeed! Wayne could only be thankful that the blacksmith gave him no time to reply.

"Well, you've come to a country where there's plenty to eat an' plenty to do. Seen Sarah Jane? Haven't! eh? Well, now, I reckoned that you and Sarah Jane was pretty good friends by this time. Where is she, mother?"

"Why, he jest come in a little bit ago; and Sarah Jane's in the back kitchen fussing; she's been fussing the livelong afternoon over his room, gettin' it to her mind. Young folks is full of notions nowdays."

This was not said in irritation, but with a sort of motherly pride, as though a woman who had a daughter like Sarah Jane could afford to indulge her in all manner of "notions." A door in the near distance opened and the subject of this explanation entered. A wholesome-

looking girl, some persons would have called her, with clear, honest eyes and very red cheeks, the color being heightened in effect by the dress she wore.

"Hallo!" shouted her father, "you've come, have you? I didn't know but you was going to stay in the back kitchen all night. This is your fellow-sufferer, Mr. — oh, yes," in obedience to an admonition from his wife that she tried to make undertone, "*Professor* Pierson, I forgot. I dunno whether Jim and me can twist our tongues to that many times a day, eh, Jim? I'm blessed if I ain't afraid I'll forgit sometimes and say 'sonny' instead, you look so uncommon young. Professor, this is my girl, my Sarah Jane; and she's a spry one, I can tell you; you'll have to get up early in the morning to get ahead of her. Think you and her can hit it off together? I'll tell you what, I guess you'll have to get her to do most of the wolloping. She's got more strength in her arms, I'll bet, than you have."

"Now, pa!" came in protest from Sarah Jane. But her voice was not harsh, and was brimful of daughterly affection as well as of suppressed mirth.

There are young men who would have been able to have met the jolly blacksmith halfway; to have discovered at once that he meant no offence, and was simply laboring in his blunt,

half-embarrassed fashion to make the young stranger feel at home. Wayne Pierson was not of that type of young manhood; or, at least, he could not at that time rise to the situation. His penetration was not at fault; he recognized in the honest blacksmith a mere effort to be funny, but his annoyance and disgust at fun or friendliness of that sort were unbounded. He had never before come in contact with such persons, and he realized that he did not in the least know how to meet them.

Sarah Jane came bravely to the rescue. Seating herself near her father, she began and kept up throughout the meal a running fire of repartee with him, parrying his thrusts at herself, and turning the point of the remark back upon him, with a quickness and keenness that it was plain the blacksmith intensely admired, and calling forth huge guffaws of laughter from the insufferable "Jim," whenever his mouth was sufficiently empty to admit of that exercise. Wayne, in thinking it over afterward, was compelled to own to himself that the girl was bright and quick-witted, and his conscience made him add that neither had she been coarse. But he revenged himself by adding sharply that he detested her and the entire tribe as well, and that it would be simply impossible for him to endure life in the same house with such people.

The meal, however, had been abundant, and,

notwithstanding the turnip in the potatoes, remarkably good. Despite the coarseness of the napery, and the thickness of the dishes, even despite the three-tined steel forks, and the fact that both the blacksmith and "Jim" disdained forks altogether, and ate with their knives, Wayne found himself making a fairly good meal. Had he but been wise enough to realize his mercies, the bread and butter, and milk and cream, and the general air of cleanliness and neatness, were such as to give him abundant reason to feel that the "lines had fallen to him in fairly comfortable places." He felt no such thing; he was dismayed, even terror-stricken, over everything, and put himself into the depths of that terrible feather bed with a groan very like despair.

X.

"*Wayne Lorimer Pierson.*"

SATURDAY morning was entirely occupied in writing a letter. Wayne Pierson, who was accustomed to expressing himself on paper, and who had a reputation for being able to do it with clearness and elegance, had never spent so much time nor wasted so much paper on a letter in his life. His little room was all but carpeted with discarded sheets, containing the words, "Dear father" and two or three, or sometimes half a dozen lines besides. When at last he enveloped and sealed his effort, assuring himself that it was the best he could do, he was far from satisfied.

Reading it over years afterward, one cannot wonder at his dissatisfaction. It read thus: —

DEAR FATHER: I hope you have suffered no anxiety on my account; I should have written sooner, but circumstances prevented. It is needless to tell you that I obeyed to the letter your last directions and "took myself out of your sight."

"*Wayne Lorimer Pierson.*"

I have known for a long time that, for reasons which I only in part understand, my presence was growing daily more disagreeable to you, and I long ago planned to relieve you permanently, so soon as I should graduate from college. I regret more than words will express that I was not able to complete my college course before starting out in life for myself. To this end I have borne in silence all sorts of misjudgings, and have for years endured a system of petty tyranny that seemed to me at times beyond endurance; but in view of our last interview, I have no doubt you will agree with me that the time arrived when I had no alternative but to go.

I came directly to the town and state from which I mail this letter, and have been fortunate enough to secure work at once. The school of which I have been made the head is to open on Monday next. A misunderstanding on the part of the teacher who was to have filled the place created an unexpected vacancy by which I profited. I am, therefore, pecuniarily independent, as regards the future; and can only regret that I am quite unable at present to repay you for the heavy expense that I have been to you through the years. The time may come when I shall be able to do so. I think I need not assure you that I will keep that end in view.

I have gone over in careful detail, many times indeed, the last words you spoke to me during our interview in the library, and am at this date as much in fog as to your possible meaning as I was at that time. Why I should need to "plot" to "divert suspicion" from myself is a mystery. And although you informed me in sufficiently distinct language that I was "the guilty one," you failed to reveal to me my guilt. I certainly considered all this a strange reward for my honest though evidently mistaken effort to keep a semblance of peace in our ruined family life.

It is not, I believe, my nature to boast of my own character or attainments, but the circumstances are peculiar, and you will therefore pardon me for saying that I find it hard to understand how a son who has sustained the reputation for character and scholarship that I certainly have during my entire college course, should be the source of disappointment and grief that your words and manner clearly intimated. However, I know, and have known for years, that I have a bitter enemy who has secured your private ear and managed to make me appear to you what I am not. It is not my intention to burden you with details. I have tried to be in every respect what a son should be, and in your estimation I have failed. The least that I

could do, under such circumstance, was to take myself out of your sight, and I have accordingly done it. If you care to hear from me, I will keep you posted from time to time as to my success or failure in life, and I shall remain always as now,

Your sincere and well-meaning son,
WAYNE LORIMER PIERSON.

There shall be no attempt to make excuses for this letter other than to say, what seems unnecessary, that its writer was still fiercely angry. Had he waited a week longer, it might, undoubtedly it would, have been a better sounding letter; but a curious undertone realization of his father's genuine anxiety as to his whereabouts kept him from waiting, although it did not keep him from quoting and requoting the words that had stabbed him, and making them as painful to his father as he could. The letter was indeed a revelation of the power that anger has over the judgment as well as over the affections, if one cares to study it in that light. It will be remembered that during his prolonged interview with himself, in the woods the day before, Wayne Pierson had frankly owned that he had been a fool; that he had caught up his father's hasty words, and attached an importance to them that they did not possess, and had al-

lowed himself to run away from home, "like any story-book idiot." But to save his life he could not have expressed any thought of this kind on paper. The moment he wrote those familiar words, "Dear father," the demon of passion seemed to perch at his elbow and move his pen. It made him ignore all the patience and faithfulness and lavish expenditure of the years, and ring the changes only on that last scene, while the father was evidently smarting under some sting that made him for the moment beside himself. It is too bad! these reckless boys, how carelessly they stab! The time may come when Wayne Pierson, as a father, will learn from bitter experience something of his father's pain, but at that time he could think only of his own pain.

Still, as has been said, he was dissatisfied with the letter. After it was gone, there were points in it of which he was ashamed, and which he would have recalled if he could. Especially did he realize that that parade of his full name, "Wayne Lorimer Pierson," was, to say the least, in extremely bad taste. Why need he have reminded his father just then that he was the grandson of old Judge Lorimer, a name still spoken throughout the country neighborhood of which he had been the autocrat almost with bated breath? His father had not joined in the general admira-

tion of Judge Lorimer; on certain legal questions they had differed, and at times differed sharply, and Wayne had more than once heard his father say, when reminded that his son bore a striking resemblance to the old Judge, that he hoped he would not be like his grandfather in every respect. Wayne knew that he was like his grandfather in character, and prided himself on it; under those circumstances it was especially silly to have taken up nearly a line in spreading out his full name before his father.

He had gone down to the kitchen to ask some questions about the mails, with the letter in his hand, and had found there the worthy blacksmith, shaving his bristling chin before the kitchen glass.

"Been writing to your father?" he asked sociably, as his keen eye took in at a glance the name on the envelope written in Wayne's boldest hand. "I always had a notion that the young fellows wrote first to their mothers, but I must say I like to see them think of their fathers, too."

"My mother is dead," said Wayne, briefly.

"Oh, is that so? Sho! I oughtn't to have spoken about mothers; I'm always putting my foot in it." There was such genuine sympathy in Mr. Thompson's tone, that even a preoccupied young man like Wayne could not but feel

it, and he forced a smile as he said that no harm had been done.

"You've got a good father, I'll warrant," continued the blacksmith, anxious to atone for a blunder. "I can see it all over you that you've been well brought up, and I daresay your father is that proud of you that he don't know how to stan' it sometimes. I would be, I know, if I had a boy like you. Daughters are all well enough," here he gave a comical wink of one eye toward Sarah Jane, who was skilfully putting together materials for a gingerbread, "but I tell you there's nothing like sons to make a father proud. You hold on to your father, young man, and write to him often, and tell him every little thing you do, or don't do. A boy don't commonly have but one good father in a lifetime, and they are worth taking trouble for. You'll excuse my calling you a boy; you look so turrible young! I'm blessed if I ain't afraid that the youngsters will forget and be calling you one of the boys. Sarah Jane, you'll have to tend up to 'em and make 'em understand what's what."

"I kind of suspicioned that he hadn't got any mother," said Mrs. Thompson, as Wayne turned abruptly and left the room, "he looks so kind of sad all the time. I dunno but I might call it gloomy. I wonder if he lost her only a spell ago? I feel dreadful sorry for him

away off here among strangers, and he so young. 'Professor Pierson!' Why, I'm afraid I should laugh if I tried to say it. I guess I'll git along without calling him anything, for a spell at least. But I mean to try to mother him up a little. I wonder if he likes custard pie?"

"You better save your petting, mother, for folks that will appreciate it," said Sarah Jane, briskly, as she whisked the completed gingerbread into the oven; "he looks downright masterful to me. He may be young, but if he doesn't know what he is about, I'll miss my calculation. I don't believe he wants any cuddling, not from us, anyhow; he'll see to it that the young ones call him 'Professor' or anything else he wants them to, or take the consequences."

In ignorance of all these opinions concerning him, and in supreme indifference as to what the Thompson family thought about anything, Wayne got through with Saturday. He visited the schoolhouse and found it very different from the college buildings with which he was familiar. Still, it wasn't a bad schoolhouse in its way, and the young man succeeded in becoming somewhat interested in it. He meant to do his best for the scholars committed to his care. It is true, he told himself, that he had been forced into teaching before he was ready, and compelled to take that which offered rather

than what he would have chosen, but the pupils should not suffer in consequence.

By evening he had forced himself to admit that he must ask for a conference with Sarah Jane, and learn from her what he could about his new surroundings.

She accepted the invitation with alacrity, and led the way to the "parlor," which Wayne had not seen before. It was a large dreary-looking room, immaculate as to neatness, but the wall paper was a distinct blue, while the new ingrain carpet was in vivid green plentifully bestrewn with red flowers. The few pictures on the walls Wayne pronounced "atrocious," and the mantel ornaments were, if possible, worse than the pictures. Yet Sarah Jane had spent the entire afternoon in trying to make the room assume the proper air for a parlor, and flattered herself that she had succeeded. She had robbed her own little room of its single ornament, a wreath of hair flowers set in a glass frame, and it now occupied the place of honor in the centre of the mantel. She could not have understood the feeling of utter disgust that Wayne Pierson had for it. Neither was he able in the least to appreciate the little thrill of elation that Sarah Jane felt, as he took the Rochester burner from her hand and set it on the table, then drew the window shades, and pushed forward the large

willow rocker for her use, while he helped himself to a straight-backed chair on the other side of the table. Sarah Jane was not accustomed to young men who took such small burdens as lamps from her hands, nor who offered her a seat, and themselves remained standing until she was seated. She had not been accustomed to these things, but she liked them. They seemed a legitimate part of the "masterful" world to which this young man belonged. She had no objection whatever to securing glimpses of it through him.

"I shall have to look to you for a good deal of help in getting acquainted with my work," he said, and his manner was more genial and friendly than it had been before. "You have the advantage of me in having already taught in the school, while I am a novice as well as a stranger."

Sarah Jane laughed. "Oh, I didn't have much to do with the girls and boys who belong to your room," she said, "I only taught the young ones. I did have a grammar class though, from that room. Professor Smith gave it to me last term because he was too lazy to take it himself. If there was ever a man too lazy to breathe, it was Professor Smith; but I didn't mind, I liked the class. I think grammar is nicer than anything else, anyhow. Don't you like to parse?"

"I believe I did rather enjoy it at one time," said Wayne, trying not to have his smile too pronounced. "I fancy I shall not especially enjoy teaching grammar, however. If I should develop as lazy a nature as your friend, Mr. Smith, am I to understand that you will take the class again?"

Sarah Jane's laugh this time had a touch of sarcasm in it. "You aren't lazy," she said, "whatever else you are; I don't believe there is a lazy hair in your head; and Professor Smith is no friend of mine — I detested him. But of course I will do whatever I am given to do. There's a hard lot of boys in the school; a few of them I just feel as though I should like to get hold of."

"Are they such hard fellows to manage?" said Wayne, with a smile that he feared was sickly; he felt that the last thing in life that he wanted to do was to "get hold" of such boys.

"Well, no," said Sarah Jane, thoughtfully, "I can't say that they are; not if they were managed right, which they haven't been, according to my way of thinking. I don't know as you will agree with me, but it always seems as though boys ought to be treated like human beings that had some rights, and did some thinking, now and then, instead of either like wild animals or fools. Don't you think so?"

"I should think there could not be two opinions about that," said Wayne, with a sudden accession of respect for Sarah Jane. He had imagined her as wanting to "get hold" of some of those boys with her muscular young arms, and try the effect of that "walloping" at which her father had hinted; and, lo! she was speaking of a moral hold.

"There's Beet Armitage now," continued Sarah Jane, "he's the ringleader. What he doesn't do, he gets the credit of doing, so in the end it comes to the same thing. Beet is expected to be bad, first, last, and always, and he hasn't the courage to disappoint people, so he lives up to their expectations. That's the way it looks to me. I've always said that I didn't think Beet had half a chance at home nor anywhere else. And if a boy don't get his rights at home, why how can he expect to get them anywhere?"

"That is true," said Wayne, a shadow crossing his face at the thought of his home and his lost rights. "What is the matter with Beet's home? What an extraordinary name he has, by the way! Can that be his full name?"

XI.

"*Bethune Breckenridge Armitage.*"

"NO," said Sarah Jane, "it isn't half of it; he's got name enough — too much of it. Bethune Breckenridge Armitage, that's the whole of it; and when Beet is up to any extra piece of mischief, he is sure to write the full name out large somewhere."

A sudden flush of color mounted to Wayne's very temples; he shaded his eyes ostensibly from the Rochester burner, but in reality from Sarah Jane. He had been unpleasantly reminded just then of "Wayne Lorimer Pierson" spread over that page.

"But for short, we call him Beet; and that is what he gets most of the time, from teachers and everybody. Though we did have a teacher once who thought that teachers oughtn't to use nicknames. What do you think about it?"

Wayne gave an evasive answer and asked another question about Beet, and Sarah Jane, who had arrested her rocking-chair to get his

opinion of nicknames, considered his evasion thoughtfully for a moment, then resumed her rocking and her narrative.

"Why, Beet has an uncomfortable home, I suppose; I never thought he was altogether to blame; I think in most cases like that there is blame on both sides. You see, it is a mixed-up family: Beet has a half-brother, or — well a kind of a half-brother, his stepmother's son, a regular molly coddle of a boy who has spent his life whining and complaining of Beet and getting him into trouble. He's smart, Joey is, in his way; and he has managed somehow to pull the wool over Beet's father's eyes; and he is a stern kind of man, Mr. Armitage is, and the consequence is, Beet gets all the scoldings and whippings and none of the fun. And the village people meddle and make things worse. Beet's got a bad name, around town; you see, the boy is so brimful of mischief that he can't keep out of it; and he's played a joke of some kind on pretty nearly every man and woman in the country around, so they are ready to believe everything bad that they can of him, and his stepmother is willing to furnish all the material they want. Don't you see how it might be? Then the boys in school — and girls, too — are so used to hearing him blamed, that they join in and help. If anything goes wrong, no matter what, the cry is right away

that Beet Armitage is at the bottom of it; and some of the things I believe in my heart he is as innocent of as a baby; but you can't prove that, and so he is getting hardened, Beet is. I just expect that boy will go to ruin unless somebody steps in and helps him, and it seems too bad. He is a nice-looking boy as ever was, when he is in good humor."

Wayne's face needed shading still. There was certainly contrast enough between "Beet's" position and his, yet there were points of similarity that could not fail to interest him. Was he possibly to be given a chance to study his own life problems as they presented themselves to others? He was painfully interested in Beet, yet he did not want to show too much of it. He studied how to word his questions in a way to give his assistant no hint of other interest than that of a teacher. But she did not wait for questions. Her interest was evidently keen and sincere.

"There's one thing about Beet," she began again, after a thoughtful pause, "that seems to me to be in the way of doing anything for him; it's a regular stumbling-block. He isn't over sixteen years old, not a day; but I tell you he can *hate* like a man of sixty; and if he doesn't just about hate that half-brother of his, why then I don't know the meaning of the word. I never saw anything like it, not in a

young fellow. Why, I believe he would kill the boy, if he could get a good chance, without any more hesitation than he would have for a worm. 'Snake!' he says, 'old slimy, slippery snake! he oughtn't to be allowed to live, and I hate myself for letting him do it.' And he looks, while he is saying it, so fierce and so full of hate that I declare I'm sometimes afraid he will be left to do something dreadful! Well, you can see what kind of a school we are likely to have, with a boy like him, and a boy like his brother to keep us in hot water half the time. I oughtn't to have told you about it, I suppose; I don't want you to get scared out before you begin; but I did want somebody to come along who would help poor Beet. I was glad when the other fellow gave us the slip; he didn't look of the right sort to do it."

"Am I to be allowed to hope that I look 'of the right sort'?" A playful response seemed to Wayne the only one that could be made, but Sarah Jane took it seriously enough.

"I don't know," she said, with an air of penetrative thoughtfulness. "I can't make up my mind. He needs a master, Beet does, and I guess you could be that, if you took the notion; but then, some kinds of masters would only hurry him on to ruin himself."

For some reason Wayne felt uncomfortable

under the gaze of her keen eyes. He did not wish to have his inner motives dissected. He made haste to change the subject and get on more general ground.

"I shall evidently have to make Bethune a subject of special study. Now as to other matters. How has the work been planned heretofore? I do not wish to make too many innovations just at first."

"Why, I dunno as there has been much plan, except the regular thing, you know. We all came into the big room first thing every morning for prayers, and then I took my youngsters out and managed them by myself the best I could. Mr. Smith didn't give me any help, I can tell you; he was too lazy for that. First thing he had was —"

But Wayne's attention had been called to a more important subject than Mr. Smith. He could distinctly feel the waves of color surging over his face as he asked the question, —

"Does the school always open with — with religious exercises?"

"Mercy! yes; you don't suppose we are heathen, do you, because we live out West? We have prayers every morning as regular as we have spelling and arithmetic. Deacon Colter would look after us in a hurry, if we didn't. It is the only thing he is particular

about. He's a good man, the deacon is, but he's awful ignorant."

"And this Mr. Smith, did he conduct the service?"

"Why, of course; there wasn't anybody but him and me to do it. Oh, the deacon comes in once in a while in time for prayers, and I used to be real glad to see him; the deacon can pray, I tell you, as though he meant it, and he does every time. Mr. Smith never asked him to read in the Bible but once. He's a terrible reader, and Mr. Smith thought *he* could read elegantly. Well, he could; but his prayers didn't amount to shucks. What is the matter with you, Mr. Pierson? Your face got just as *red* and now it is pale. You ain't sick, are you? Mother could give you something, if you don't feel well; she's a master hand at nursing people up."

"I am perfectly well, thank you," said Wayne, with unnecessary hauteur. "I am interested in learning all about this matter. Do I understand you that it is a rule of the school to open each session with some religious service? What I mean is, do the board of trustees require it?"

"Why, of course! Don't they always? Even Squire Willard, who isn't much on practising religion, some folks think, wants the school children brought up all right. For that

matter, he wants everything done that they do down to Westover. Hasn't he talked Westover to you yet? Why, Mr. Pierson, do you really mean that they don't have prayers in college?"

"Oh, yes, certainly;" and Wayne felt that his face was growing red again. "But in college there are generally clergymen among the professors."

"Oh, well, I shouldn't think they would need a clergyman just to open school with a short prayer. You are one of that kind, aren't you?"

"A clergyman? Oh, no, indeed!"

It was Sarah Jane's turn to blush to the very roots of her hair.

"I know that," she said, with an embarrassed laugh. "You don't suppose I took a boy like you for a minister, do you? But I mean you belong to the kind of people who know how to pray. Aren't you a member of the church?"

"I have not that honor. Is that one of the requisites demanded by the deacon you mentioned?"

"N-o," said Sarah Jane, very slowly. "I dunno as it is. Fact is, I never thought about it; I s'posed all teachers were church members. Though I'm not one of those folks that think joining the church is everything. I should have liked Mr. Smith better if he hadn't been

a professor; it would have seemed more honest, because it didn't appear to mean anything with him. But I had a notion that you —"

She came to a distinct stop, and seemed not to mind Wayne's eyes fixed searchingly upon her. There was silence for so long that he felt compelled to assist her.

"Yes," he said insinuatingly. "You thought I was — not a clergyman, but —"

Sarah Jane drew a long sigh and brought her eyes back from the floor to his face.

"Yes," she said, "I thought you was one of that sort; a praying man; and if you aren't, I'm awfully sorry; because, I tell you honestly, I don't believe anybody else can do a thing for Beet Armitage. He's got so far along on the wrong road, and has such a feeling of hate in his heart for that tormentor of his, that nothing but a new heart altogether is going to do him any good. And I thought a young man, and a stranger might — Well, there's no use in talking. But you'll have to manage morning prayers, somehow. We can all rattle over the Lord's Prayer together, I suppose; that is what Mr. Smith did whenever he felt particularly lazy, or when he felt so cross, and scolded so much just beforehand, that he could see himself that his prayers didn't match his life. I never liked saying the Lord's Prayer in concert,

someway; the youngsters get in the habit of rattling it off so carelessly, you know, that it doesn't seem like praying; but it's better than nothing, I suppose."

Wayne interrupted her with dignity: "We shall be able to arrange all that to our satisfaction, I hope, Miss Thompson; but now let me learn, if I can, just what class of scholars we have to deal with, and just what has been accomplished heretofore." He drew a note-book and pencil from his pocket, and began to write rapidly while Sarah Jane was put through a systematic list of questions that kept her wits keenly at work to give satisfactory answers, and increased her respect for a "college education."

"Didn't he put me through, though!" she said to her father, who listened with the keenest relish to her account of the evening's interview. "I tell you, that young fellow knows what he is about! I shouldn't wonder if we'd have such teaching in this district as we never had before, if he does look like nothing but a boy. It's a great thing to have a college education, father."

"Yes," said the blacksmith, "so 'tis; but it's a great thing to have uncommon sense, too; I'll risk you, Sarah Jane; don't you go to being down in the mouth because you ain't college educated. You've done the best you could; and you ain't as old as Methuselah yet.

Who knows but you will git an addition tacked on to your education some day?"

It was the good blacksmith's dream to give this girl of his not only a college education, but the best that life had to give to any girl.

Meantime, the boy with the "college education" went upstairs in no enviable frame of mind. It was all very well to put on a brave face before Sarah Jane, and awe her with questions about "text-books," and "language lessons," and the "vertical system," and other technical words and phrases that were as A B C to him, but were new and bewildering to her — the fact remained that he was simply appalled with the magnitude of the duties that lay before him. He sank into the side of the feather bed and tried to think how he should manage about those opening exercises. *He* lead in a service of prayer! Above all other efforts the thought of the Lord's Prayer dismayed him. Whatever else he might be, he assured himself positively that he was not a hypocrite, and could such as he repeat each morning those solemn words, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"? Had he forgiven Leon? Did he even care to forgive him? Had he any expectation or intention of trying to do so? No, assuredly he had not. On the contrary, he distinctly intended at some time in his life to repay the villain with interest for all the injury

and pain he had caused him. The mode of payment should be refined, dignified, such as a gentleman might indulge, but it should, nevertheless, be keen and deep-reaching. And he was sufficiently well educated theologically to be sure that it would not be in accord with the spirit of the Lord's Prayer. He and "Beet," it seemed, were in the same condition. Beet could no more truthfully offer the Lord's Prayer than he could himself. Why should the superstitions of an ignorant deacon or two force them to it? Yet Sarah Jane had been very emphatic; and it seemed altogether probable that such an innovation as a school carried on without any form of religious service would not be tolerated in this community.

Sarah Jane, well-informed though she certainly was on many points, had not even heard, it seemed, that there were schools conducted without any reference to the forms of religion. The thought occurred to him that the way of escape might be to put this duty off upon her shoulders. He smiled a cynical smile as he told himself that undoubtedly she was one of "that kind." Then he laughed as he imagined her consternation over such a proposal. That would be infinitely worse than the lazy Mr. Smith had done. She had made it very apparent that the "Professor," and no other, was the one who was expected to lead in such a service.

What was to be done? The longer he thought about it, the more dismayed he grew. As he heard the distant rumble of a long freight train crawling through the town, a wild desire to pack his bag, and slip softly out at the unguarded front door, and board that train came to him with such force that he half arose from the billows of feathers that had closed around him. To be free once more, to bid good-by to the red schoolhouse, that he was afraid he hated; to have nothing to do with the burly blacksmith and the insufferable "Jim"; to assume no responsibility toward "Beet" and his "molly coddle" brother; to be stabbed no more by Sarah Jane's keen-cut phrases that she did not know were stabs. It was a tremendous temptation. He might do it dignifiedly. He might even wait until Monday morning, and then call upon Squire Willard and assure him that, after giving the matter careful consideration, he had decided that he was not fit to cope with the peculiarities of the "upper deestrict." It was really the thought of his predecessor who had failed them, that held this young man a prisoner.

"Why did Mr. Jenkins fail to keep his engagement with you?" he had suddenly thought to ask of the blacksmith while they were at supper; and the answer had been full and emphatic.

"Got a bigger chance somewheres else, that's the reason. Made an out and out engagement, put it in black and white, and had his box of books sent on ahead, and all that; and then give us the slip! It wa'n't till after the school had ought to have took up that he was heard from; and then he owned up that he could get a whole dollar a week more in another district that he knew of, and he thought it his duty to go there. His 'duty,' sho! I hate to see a man do a thing as mean as pusley and then whine about *duty*. What become of his promises? Isn't a man's word good for nothing, I'd like to know? I'm a poor man, and always expect to be, and I have to think about dollars as careful as anybody, I reckon, but I've never seen the time, and I hope I never shall, when for a dollar a week I can afford to go back on my word. His name was Ezra, too; pity to waste a good Bible name that way! He said he had a younger brother to help, and must earn all he could. Sho! a fellow who can't be trusted, can't help anybody."

And Wayne Pierson, who had supposed himself utterly indifferent to the entire Thompson family, discovered that he did not want to bring his character into contempt before the worthy blacksmith. He had promised, and for one term, at least, he must endure.

XII.

The Way Out.

REACHING the conclusion he had, it was like Wayne Pierson to face the situation manfully, and set himself seriously to work to discover, if possible, an honorable way out of this undeniable dilemma. There were three ways out, and one of them lay uphill. He stated the propositions to himself: first, the custom of opening the school with religious exercises might be abandoned; second, a minister or deacon might be engaged to come in each morning and conduct the service; third, he must do it himself!

He discussed these different plans at some length, examining pros and cons. The summing up was something like this: the first scheme might be difficult of accomplishment. It would probably antagonize the religious prejudices and thus be unwise, even if consent from the trustees could be secured. The second plan was also beset with objections. If he should engage a sort of chaplain, he might be late occasionally, or some mornings not appear

at all; then embarrassments would necessarily follow. There was danger, too, that such an arrangement might lose him the respect of the school and the community, and his own self-respect as well. Moreover, there was a ludicrous side to hiring a man to do his praying. It was not to be thought of. There remained this, then: he himself must lead a daily religious service in the school. He would not allow himself to argue the point even. It had to be done, and he must do it. The problem now was — how?

He arose from his enervating feather seat, and began to pace the floor with knitted brows and arms folded rigidly behind him. While he pondered he was conscious of an undercurrent of irritating thought going on, as if an exasperating somebody were buzzing in his ears, reminding him, in the words of the old proverb, that he had "jumped from the frying-pan into the fire," and that, though he had got out of one set of troubles for the present by running away, he had plunged into others — greater? Not by any means; these could be met and conquered, he told himself. And it began to look after a time as if he had reached some satisfactory conclusions, for he prepared for rest with the air of one who has settled something, saying to himself as he was falling asleep, "If only school did not open Monday,

I could manage it nicely with another week before me."

School did not open Monday. And the young teacher had a struggle with his conscience not to feel real delight thereat. That very night a merciless storm swept through the valley, uprooting trees and damaging buildings. The only roof that was "lifted clean off and laid down in a medder," in the language of one of the villagers, was that of the schoolhouse. It was "queer," the trustees told each other as they stood in dismay about the wrecked building, that this particular roof should be the one to fly off.

"Looks 'most as if Providence had something agin us," a sour-faced man remarked; "school ort to 'a' took up most a month ago, and here, jes's we git all ready, off goes the ruff. No tellin' how long we'll be hendered now."

"For a week at least, I hope," was the mental comment of the teacher-elect, as he stood with the others surveying the ruin the storm had wrought.

"Miss Thompson," Wayne began one evening after supper, when order had been restored to the large room which served as both dining and sitting room.

"You needn't Miss Thompson me," that young woman disclaimed.

"La, yes," her mother interposed; "Sarah Jane'd hardly know who you meant."

"Miss Sarah, then; how will that do?"

And then Sarah Jane had a swift dawning perception that the world to which this young man belonged counted it more refined to use one name rather than two, and she had a twinge of regret that she had not long ago insisted upon being called either "Jane" or "Sarah."

"Sarah will do," she said; "and you may leave off the 'Miss.'"

But Wayne had no intention of levelling all walls of formality, and putting himself on terms of such intimacy as this would imply.

"Did singing form a part of the opening exercises in the school?" he asked.

"No; we tried it awhile, but Professor Smith couldn't sing more'n a frog, and there wa'n't any one to lead."

"Are there any good voices among the pupils?"

"Oh, yes; Beet's got a splendid voice, and Joe sings too, and plays the violin. Ruby Knowles, she sings like a nightingale —"

Wayne had heard some stirring notes from Sarah Jane herself as she moved briskly about in the morning.

"Why did not you or the nightingale girl lead?" he asked.

"He never asked us to lead. He thought a girl couldn't do anything, anyway."

"I notice you have an organ in the other room. Suppose we ask a few of the older scholars to come in to-morrow evening and sing, if your mother is willing."

"Oh, I can't play yet," Sarah Jane demurred, "and I don't know anybody who can — on the organ. I only took lessons a little while, and can just pick out a few tunes."

"I'll do the playing," Wayne said, "if you'll help sing."

Filled with admiration at thought of a man who could play the organ, both mother and daughter hastened to express their delight at the proposal, Mrs. Thompson adding, in an overflow of generosity, "Jest you use that great lazy room whenever you like."

Accordingly, the next evening saw Beet and Joe Armitage, with a half dozen others, gathered about the organ in Mrs. Thompson's front room, where the new teacher played and led the singing. They were shy at first of the "new professor," those boys and girls; but when they saw that he threw his whole self into it, and played and sang with spirit, they found courage to let out their voices and call for favorite hymns or songs, the organist, with or without notes, playing them promptly, — "Dixie," "Swanee River," "Star-spangled Ban-

ner," and "Robin Adair," up to "Coronation" and other stately old airs of their fathers. The singing was not artistic; it was better; it filled both performers and listeners with delight; the latter consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Thompson and Jim, who nodded approvingly and whispered, —

"My! but he's a smart chap!"

It was not by any means for his own amusement that Wayne had gathered this singing company, though he did have an object — two of them. One was to train singers for the school, the other looked to the establishment of friendly relations between himself and the older pupils. What his reserved nature had most dreaded in this undertaking was contact with lawlessness. He realized that it would not be an easy matter for one not many years the senior of some of them to establish authority without a certain amount of conflict, unless he could by some means forestall possible rebellion, and make those pupils his friends.

And surely it seemed as though the question of subduing the worst boy in school was far toward being solved that night. Beet loved music, and when he was assured that he had a fine bass voice which needed only cultivation to make it first class, his secret delight knew no bounds; added to this, when the master did not put on airs as if he knew it all, but asked his

opinion occasionally, why then Beet was prepared to champion the new teacher whom he beforehand threatened to "thrash." It was cause for pride, too, in Beet's mind, that the upper district had a teacher straight from college who, with all the rest he knew, could play the organ and sing one part as well as another. Westover couldn't go ahead of that. He had stopped singing himself at times to hear the professor's wonderful tenor, perhaps gliding into soprano and from that to bass, according to their needs. Yes, he was even willing to call him "professor" now, though he had scornfully declared on the day of his arrival that he never would, because he was nothing but a boy. But now, by those marvellous gifts, he was worthy of all honor. Indeed, Beet was in the way of becoming a hero-worshipper when a day or two later the teacher accepted from him an invitation to a ball game and seemed well up in all the ins and outs thereof. Moreover, he had called him—not "Beet" nor "Bethune"—which he hated—but "Armitage." "When a fellow got called like that he was next door to being a man."

The conquest of the others who had met to sing was also assured, for greatly to their delight they were invited to consider themselves a part of a school choir to meet regularly for practice and instruction. They would begin at once,

and while they waited for the schoolhouse would improve the time and sing every evening. The zest with which he entered into this work, and the interest inspired by his pupils, surprised the teacher himself. He drew them into conversation after the singing hour each night, studying them meanwhile, curiously, as if all were rare specimens in biology. The bright ones sprung questions upon him which he might have been puzzled to answer had he not been an omnivorous reader with fine memory; as it was, the prompt replies, combining instruction with fun, charmed them into admiration and hearty good will. In all this there was no overstepping the line between teacher and pupil; Wayne's natural dignity precluded that as well as their reverence for his knowledge.

Work upon the schoolhouse went on but slowly, the roof being so badly wrecked that a new one had been found necessary; rain also added to the delay. Meantime Wayne was by no means idle. He made calls, studied all sorts of theories for conducting a model school, and sent for many things he considered necessary to its success, chief among which was a cabinet organ. An old friend of his father was a dealer in musical instruments in Chicago. Wayne had confidence in his judgment and honesty, and wrote asking that a second-hand organ at a certain price be sent him without delay. He considered

this and some other expenses a necessity if he meant to make his first venture out in the world a success, and he did, even though the sphere was humble; he should do his best. When therefore his other prudent self interfered, charging him with improvidence, he ignored the admonition as youth is prone to do, and went on, ordering besides several copies of singing books. This done, he sent home for maps and pictures collected through the years by means of gifts and his own purchases. Apparently he had forgotten that his stay was to be short in this place, and was planning as if for years.

Wayne's first view of the inside of the schoolhouse had been most depressing; he had taken in each dismal detail,— the air of desolation, the hacked desks, the smoky walls, the grimy windows, and the indescribable odor adhering to an old schoolroom: odors made up of generations of lunches,—bread-and-butter, and headcheese, pie, and doughnuts. It had seemed to him as if he could not spend months there. Why should not a place in which young people stayed half of the time be a little better than a barn? He confided his desires and ambitions concerning that room to Sarah Jane, asking, as the time drew near to occupy it, "Can't we do something to make that place more attractive?"

This was a new idea; no teacher had ever suggested the like before.

"The boys would just racket around and spoil everything if we did," Sarah Jane answered after reflection.

"Oh no, I think not; I was a boy not so long ago, and I didn't do those things."

"You!" — and the girl put an emphasis on the word as if language failed to express the immeasurable distance between him and them. "Well, we can make it clean any way," she said alertly; "I'll go right off and get the girls to come and help."

Certain college men would have opened their eyes wide in astonishment could they have seen their elegant classmate actually carrying water for a company of girls who swept and scrubbed and scoured till windows and desks and floors testified to the virtues of soap and water and strength — the trustees had hired the walls whitened, thanks to the energies and insistence of Sarah Jane.

"Now," that young woman said to her helpers as they started for home that night, "*he* thinks all's done that's going to be. Let's surprise him a bit. What if we get some shades for those staring windows? How many will take a paper and go round and raise enough to buy 'em? I'll give a dollar. It's got to be done to-morrow, and the next day they must be bought and put up."

Each girl promised, and began that very night

to coax money out of everybody they met, as only girls can. The outcome of those days of hard work was, that the Saturday night before the opening of school saw a transformation in the old place. The windows were clothed in neat shades, the teacher's desk stood on a large square of bright carpeting, the stove shone in blackness, and in each window was a plant — choice treasures culled from many homes; the assistant teacher brought a pot of pinks filled with buds and a monthly rose, these graced the professor's desk.

It remained now for him to do his part toward beautifying. Securing Beet's help that evening, they went to the schoolhouse with great secrecy. A rush of surprise and delight came over him when he saw what had been done; though reared in luxury, he keenly appreciated these homely efforts. He noticed that the room of his assistant, though clean, was utterly bare, she had herself managed that all the brightness should go to his room. The unselfish kindness touched him, and when the pictures were unpacked he hastened to hang upon the walls of the small room a lovely Madonna and two gay little water-colors. When the organ was set up and the walls covered with maps and pictures, it really seemed an exceedingly cheerful, pleasant place, and the young teacher turned the key with a sense of

satisfaction, even elation, which he would not have thought possible for him when first he surveyed that ungainly building — the red schoolhouse.

Among the books Wayne had ordered was one rather new to him. Its title was "The Book of Common Prayer." He sat down to examine it with eagerness. It was to be an important factor in smoothing the way about those opening exercises. While he felt that he could not honestly repeat the Lord's Prayer with that one searching clause over which he stumbled, he yet had no hesitancy in going as far as he could consistently. He was willing and glad, he argued, to acknowledge God as Sovereign of the universe, the father and protector of mankind, the one from whom all blessings flow, and deserving of honor, praise, and gratitude. He was not even averse to confessing a sense of unworth in a general way, but the story of the atoning sacrifice was to him as an idle tale. He had not yet apprehended Christ, like that other young man of old whom the Master loved but sent on his way sorrowing.

Certainly there could be nothing wrong in reading prayers, Wayne told himself, inasmuch as it was practised by a large evangelical denomination, and neither would it be irreverent to omit the parts that he could not conscien-

tiously repeat when it was but the composition of a man. Why should he not make use of this book? Why should he, when his training had been in another direction? The young man did not like to go deep into this question. He would have been forced to admit that it seemed a solemn thing to come before God with words of his own, especially when there had been no public profession of allegiance. He was not at home in the language of prayer; fluent enough on all other themes, his tongue might here forget its cunning, and that that would be most humiliating, settled the question.

When the pupils came trooping into school that Monday morning, they stood in open-mouthed amazement. Was this lovely, clean, bright place school? Pictures and plants and, above all, an organ! It would seem that all this had a refining influence at once, for some of the boys went back to wipe their feet. Even the wildest boys forgot their usual pranks on opening day. And no wonder; for when the bell rang, here went Beet and some of his choice spirits to the upper end of the room to special seats set in a half-circle about the organ. Evidently their leader had abdicated. When the professor took his seat at the organ, and led off in "Coronation" — Joe Armitage's violin joining —

when the trained choir "burst into song," the teacher's fine voice soaring uppermost, then the whole school, carried away by a wave of enthusiasm, joined with fervor in the grand old hymn and made the rafters ring. "Whoever knew we could sing like that!" — their triumphant glances said to each other. Then came a speech from the teacher, brief and practical; he asked them to coöperate with him in making this the very best school in the county. He expected to give to them a winter of hard work, and would they not promise faithful study and good conduct in return?

"Let me beg you to bear in mind," he said, "that your work is not simply to commit and recite lessons, but to discipline mind and mould character."

The few impressive words of the young teacher, his face glowing with earnestness, gave to some of them the first glimpse of an idea that every hour spent in that room was of utmost importance and must be accounted for.

There followed a short reading of Scripture, then the prayer, and not even Sarah Jane, when she heard the words, — "Father of all mercies, we, thine unworthy servants, do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving kindness to us," — knew that they came from a prayer book; true, the teacher had

a fine memory and needed not to glance at the book. After this came another hymn, and the opening exercises for that day were over.

So much had they been enjoyed that all were sorry when they ended. Formerly this had been the most tedious time of the whole day, and usually devoted to mischief; on this morning they had no leisure to throw even one paper ball or twitch the braids of the girl who sat before them. They were singing for dear life out of bran, span new books and listening to a new Bible, for the teacher had chosen a striking lesson, and made it so vivid by correct reading that it was true, as they said, they "never heard it afore."

Strangely enough the teacher enjoyed it more than any one of them. Those rough, untaught voices chiming in with fervor, those eager, upturned faces, appealed to him. He wanted to help them. He forgot that he had seas of trouble, and that the place was dreary, and that he longed inexpressibly for college life again. This was his school, his kingdom, and he would make it fair and strong.

XIII.

Progress, and Problems.

THERE are reasons why one would like to linger over that winter which marked Wayne Pierson's first experience of independent life. In many respects it was an entirely different winter from the one he had imagined on the first night when he sank among those obnoxious feathers, and, according to his custom, made a mental picture foreshadowing it. To his own unbounded surprise he found himself thoroughly enjoying his work. More than once, before spring opened, he told himself with little thrills of satisfaction that about one thing he had certainly been right: he was evidently designed for a teacher. His scholars would have agreed with him. As the weeks passed, and the new plans that had been introduced were continually reënforced with others, thus keeping up the pleasant excitement, every boy and girl in the school voted him in their different grades of language a success. Those morning services especially, that were to have been such a trial

to the new teacher, became an actual source of pride. The idea of having a trained choir took possession of the leader. He was charmed with the material that he found in the rough, and spent no little time in developing it. Sarah Jane, he told himself, if she had had proper advantages, would have possessed a really remarkable voice; as it was, it was worth cultivating. As for Beet, or "Armitage," as he was now being called even by some of the older scholars, Wayne declared that he should have opportunities. He was still only a boy, and "one of these days" he should become such a basso that there would be a satisfaction in hearing himself spoken of as his first teacher.

"Reflected glory," said the young man to himself, with a laugh so gleeful that it would have astonished his stepmother; "why shouldn't I have a little of that, since my own expectations have been nipped in the bud?" He could think this, and still laugh, because he did not put any confidence in such thoughts. His determination to take, one day, such a position in the cultured world as his father would hear of with pride and joy, was never stronger; of course he would succeed.

His home relations, by the way, were peculiar, and deserve special mention. During the five days that had intervened between Wayne Pierson's disappearance and the arrival of that

letter which it cost him so much trouble to write, his father had grown old rapidly. His heart was torn with a hundred different anxieties, every one of them enhanced by the fact that his conscience was by no means at rest. He remembered the harsh words that he had last spoken to his son: what if they should be the last that he could ever speak to him! As the days passed, this torture grew, and he went about with so haggard a face and eyes so sunken, that his wife was alarmed. He gave almost no attention to his pressing business concerns, but gave himself to trying to find trace of his son, and yet to do it quietly, in a way that would shield the boy from further exposure of every sort. His visit to the college and his interview with several members of the Faculty opened his eyes in a way that did not lessen the pain at his heart. He had been unjust, then, all the time to his boy! and to the trust imposed on him by the boy's dead mother! The Faculty spoke very plainly; the only fault they had ever had to find with his son had been this unaccountable absence from his work, just at the beginning, as they might say, of his last important year. They had looked to him to do the institution honor; he was without exception the finest scholar that had been with them for years. What was detaining him? The father mentally groaned, but

offered no outward sign; his manner was indirect but dignified. He left the officials thinking that some grave family matter, about which the keen-brained lawyer did not choose to talk, was detaining their favorite pupil for a few days.

The dean, being confronted by his own letter that had caused all the trouble, uttered an exclamation of impatient dismay. How was it possible that he could have transposed those two names! yet that he had done so was evident; his apologies and regrets were sincere and profuse, but the father scarcely heard them, and was so preoccupied with the all-absorbing question, "Where is Wayne?" that he did not take to heart his stepson's downfall as he would otherwise have done. Indeed, throughout the trying experience, Leon Hamilton, if he had but known it, had excellent reason for being grateful to his brother. For once, Mr. Pierson allowed his own boy to fill his thoughts to the almost entire exclusion of that other boy to whom he had earnestly tried to be a father. As the days passed and he heard nothing, the poor father told himself that to hear that his darling was safe with his mother who understood him and had never wronged him would be a relief. Yet,—so strange are human hearts, that no sooner had he read the letter which at last saved his reason to him, than an extraordinary reaction took place. Wayne was

safe, then, and comfortable, and had been all the time that he had paced his room through sleepless nights! The letter sounded to him so cold, so hard, so insolent! to talk about paying him for all the expense that had been incurred on his account! and to spread his full name "Wayne Lorimer Pierson" over half a page of his letter! Oh! the father was stabbed infinitely worse than the son meant him to be.

In fact, justice must be done to that boy who did not understand fathers, nor know very much, after all, about human pain; he had not meant that sentence about repaying his father as a stab. It had been an awkward, blundering way of giving expression to a vague fear he had that his father was being pecuniarily embarrassed, and a desire to prove to him that his son could not only take care of himself, but hoped to be in a position to do more than that. So they did not understand each other, these two, any better than they had for years. Smarting under the sense of injury that came with the reaction, the father replied to the letter. He said nothing about those days and nights of agony, that all his friends could see had aged him, but in words of smooth sarcasm congratulated his son on having a nature that enabled him to cut loose in a moment of time from home and all home ties and helps, merely because his father, during a time when he was

tortured by troubles known only to himself, had spoken a few sharp words! This, after careful consideration, was all the reference that he decided to make to the dean's letter and his own misunderstanding. And he made the decision in love, too. Since Wayne was not, and, as a student, never had been, unworthy of his trust, why should he pain him by revealing all that had been believed against him?

Wayne, of course, knew nothing about it, — so the father argued, — and need never know. Let him continue to consider that that last interview referred on his part to the uncomfortable relations between the two young men. Wayne could not consider himself altogether blameless here; though sometime, perhaps, the father told himself, he would say to Wayne that doubtless he had been often deceived in this regard, as he had in the college life — but he could not say it then; the pain of Wayne's letter was too heavy upon him. His own was brief, and cold; though he closed with an assurance that he should always be glad to hear from his son, and always ready to help him to the extent of his ability, even to the extent of paying all his college expenses as heretofore. Then he said that he would not sign himself, "Edward Everett Pierson" as he did in very important business letters, but, "Your affectionate father."

Wayne had blushed over this, and then he had sighed a long sigh so full of disappointment that had good Mrs. Thompson heard it she would have hastened to make him a very thick custard pie. He had hoped that his father's letter would throw some light on the strange charges that had been made against him, but it had not. The letter did not anger him, as his had angered his father; he had had time to grow quiet. It simply disappointed him, and he went on misunderstanding. He had decided by this time that he had undoubtedly been a fool to leave home in the way he did; but he believed that having done so, the sensible thing was to stay away and carry out his present trust.

"My father is in financial trouble," he said, as he folded away the letter, "I am quite sure of it; that probably is the explanation of the 'troubles known only to himself'; does he think that I will go back and make his burdens heavier! If he had confided in me, I would have lightened them long ago; as it is, the least I can do for him is to support myself."

So he wrote again, after a few weeks, a short letter that he tried not to make dignified, but all the time the demon at his shoulder told him that Mrs. Pierson would read it too; and he must have a care what he said, so that

she could not twist it to suit her views. And she "twisted" it with perfect ease.

"Poor boy!" she said with a sigh, "how angry he is, and how carefully he nurses his rage! He is not wholly to blame; that is like his grandfather, I think you told me. These hereditary traits are so hard to overcome. My poor Leon inherited such a rollicking, fun-loving disposition that I sometimes fear that he will never learn self-control. All his college troubles, you know, have grown out of this disposition to have a good time."

Letters were exchanged but rarely after that. The father was very busy, very weary after business hours, and very much hurt with his son. The stepson had gone wrong, it is true; but he seemed to be really penitent and was doing better in college, and was very thoughtful for him when at home, while Wayne — here the father sighed.

And the son, who was working harder in the red schoolhouse "out West" than he had worked in college, looked forward steadily to the time when he should be able to "help father," and failed each week to help him as he might have done. They do it so often, these wise, foolish boys.

The least satisfactory part of Wayne's work was with the boy Armitage. Not in the direction that he had feared; no more loyal adhe-

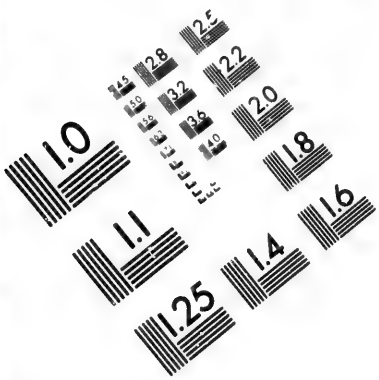
rent to the new professor could be found in the school than he; and being a leader, he kept the turbulent spirits in admirable subjection, so that the "contact with lawlessness," which Wayne had feared, had not to be endured.

Young Armitage had never realized, until he came in contact with Wayne, that his powerful voice was for any purpose but to roar through the woods with and frighten little children. Under Wayne's tuition he was developing a passionate love for music, which went far toward subduing his rough nature. That choir, by the way, became a continued source of interest and delight. It attracted marked attention in the little village that had few objects of general interest. It was Squire Willard who started the custom which soon became a fashion — that of dropping in of a morning to the schoolhouse for "Prayers." The "trained choir" was always ready to entertain any guests who came, and the young teacher who had grown used to his prayer book, and could depend upon his memory, had ceased to inwardly tremble, even with a dozen guests present, when it fell to his lot to roll off some of the majestic sentences found in his Book of Prayer. There is no accounting for the conceits which the human conscience will adopt on occasion. Wayne's told him, with a logic that he did not stop to refute, that to read

from a prayer book, or to formally quote from it the ideas of others, was very different from speaking, in prayer, words of one's own. He was not being a hypocrite; he was simply "leading the devotions of others" in some of the grandest words that had been written through the centuries. He began himself to like the sound of them.

It was near the holiday vacation that Wayne conceived the idea of training his choir to give a concert in the little town hall, asking for a silver offering at the close; said offering to be used to buy lamps for the schoolhouse, that the debating society which he had formed might have more light on their subjects than they had been able to secure heretofore. The idea met with instant approval on the part of the choir; and when with infinite pains the training progressed and culminated in a triumphant finale in the town hall before a delighted audience, the admiration of the town's people for the prize they had secured knew no bounds. Squire Willard, especially when the teachers from the Westover High School came down to the concert in a body, and expressed themselves as delighted, felt that his cup of pride was full. The next day it overflowed; for the *Westover Chronicle* gave a detailed account of the concert, and closed with the statement that "Professor Pierson and his matchless





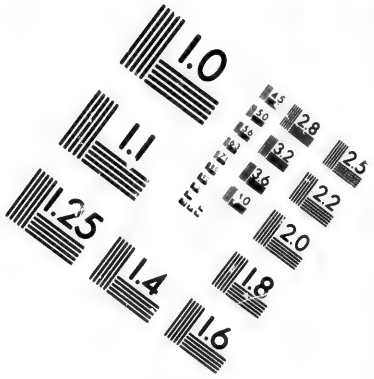
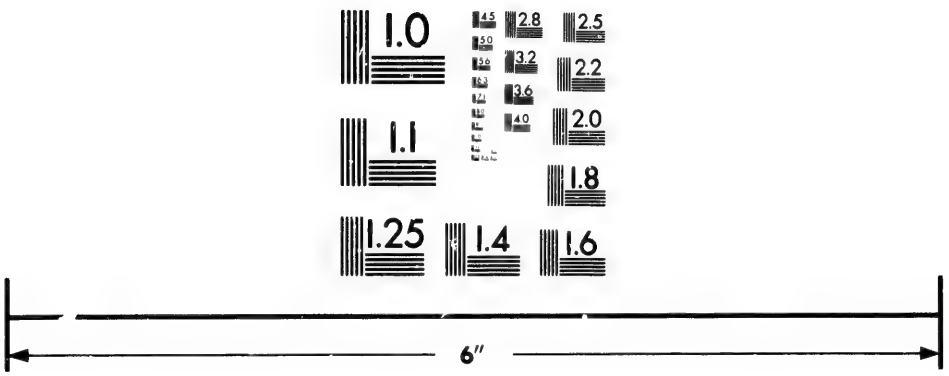
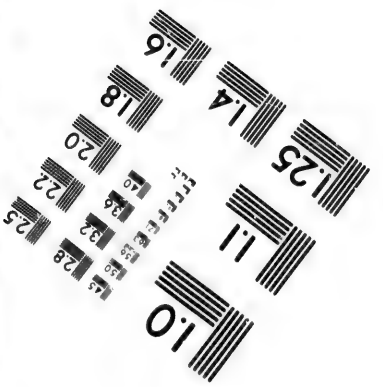
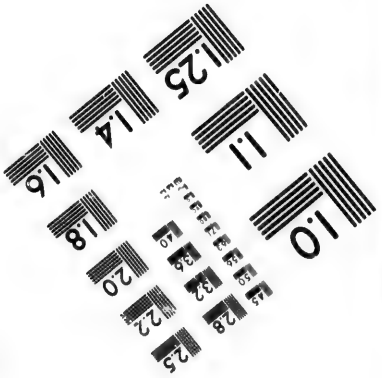


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company of trained singers had given the music-loving people in that vicinity such a treat as they were rarely able to enjoy; one, indeed, that would do credit to any Eastern city." What had Squire Willard to wish for after that?

Wayne laughed uproariously over the notice, and sent a paper heavily marked to his Aunt Crete; then sat himself down in his study chair to face and study a problem that continually haunted him. That boy Beet; he was not doing for him what ought to be done. There was nothing that Beet did not stand ready to do or to give up doing for his sake; he knew that his influence was unbounded, and it was this that troubled him.

In numberless ways had Beet improved, but he still hated his stepbrother, the "molly-coddle," with all the intensity of his fierce nature, and Wayne was compelled to admit to himself that he sympathized only too heartily with this feeling; he detested Joey with a vigor that deepened as his knowledge of him grew. The weak, half-developed, wholly spoiled boy was as unlike the stalwart athlete, Leon Hamilton, as it was possible for him to be, yet there were points of similarity in the two characters. Joey was what the girls called "slippery." He had a way of making his own conduct look angelic, and his brother's the opposite, that was

almost admirable in its skill. As Sarah Jane had said, he was "sharp"; on occasion, he was also sly, and small, and stopped at no meanness, however minute, that would help him to carry his point. How could such a nature fail to remind Wayne of what he had suffered at the hands of his stepbrother? He wished that Armitage would not come to him for advice, as he constantly did, or for sympathy, which was worse.

"What would you do, Professor? Would you stand such a thing? He's cheating father, too, and that's the meanest of it; father ought to know. I've done my best to tell him, but he can't understand. I say that fellow ought to be killed, that's the only way out; he'll go on cheating everybody till he is. He's such an everlasting sneak, though, that I don't know but he would cheat the grave, and crawl out of it somehow, if he was dead."

"Armitage!" would the dignified young "professor" say, "such talk is unworthy of you. No matter how much of a villain a person may be, you are not called upon to rid the earth of him. Let the hand of justice attend to such matters."

"Well, now, I wouldn't kill him, of course: I don't mean that kind of talk, you know; but what I say is, that he ought to be come up with, somehow. Don't you think so? Say,

I've been thinking about a plan —" And then would follow a careful outline of a scheme designed to bring the obnoxious Joey into humiliating prominence, in the direction where he would most feel it. A scheme so keen and requiring such skill and courage to carry it out that Wayne, who was sure that a word from him would set it in motion, could not help admiring the brightness of it all; but he would gravely shake his head.

"No, Armitage, don't do that, it isn't gentlemanly; you cannot afford, for the sake of a little revenge, to give up being a gentleman, you know. On account of your own self-respect let the whole thing pass." And Armitage, with something between a groan and a grimace, would mutter that he was afraid it would kill him to be a gentleman all the time, if that serpent had got to live; but he would turn away, and Wayne would know that he had once more conquered. But deep within his own heart could be heard distinctly the undertone, "You have only conquered the surface; you are not using your influence as you might."

There were others, besides himself, who knew this, and Wayne knew that they knew it. Sarah Jane had only admiration for the brilliant young professor who had won even Beet Armitage; but her father, the keen-eyed blacksmith, shook his head and said sorrowfully: —

"I wisht he'd win his *heart* into the right place; it's all outside, Sarah Jane, and won't last." Something in line with the same thought he expressed to Wayne.

Then there was Jim — that insufferable Jim, who used his knife at all times when he shouldn't, and who made a fearful sound with his lips when he ate, as though his soup plate were filled with *f*'s and *s*'s, and who in countless other ways irritated the nerves of the professor. Jim said, solemnly, one day: —

"What Beet wants is somebody that'll show him how to get rid of the devil *in his own heart*. If that can't be done, I wouldn't give shucks for Beet's life, no matter how much he can sing."

And they knew, all those people knew, that "Professor Pierson" could do with Beet Armitage what he would.

XIV.

"*Sarah.*"

IF Wayne Pierson, during his rush through that unique winter, had stopped to consider it, nothing would have surprised him more than his relations with Sarah Jane, or "Miss Sarah," as he carefully called her. That she liked the new name — as indeed she liked everything that the new professor said and did — was most apparent.

"I wish Nancy Ann wouldn't go around the house yelling 'Sarah Jane' at me!" she said to her mother in a burst of confidential indignation. "Nancy Ann" was an importation from one of the distant farms — a girl who wanted to work for her board and go to school; and the worthy blacksmith, chiefly, be it confessed, for Nancy Ann's own sake, decided that "mother" might as well have somebody to "step about" a little for her, now that Sarah Jane had so many new notions about school that she didn't have much time to help. "Mother" did not take kindly to the idea of outside help, she would really much rather have done all the "stepping"

herself; but every member of this family had imbibed the spirit of the golden rule, and tried to measure their lives by it; so Mother Thompson bravely took up her cross and followed Nancy Ann about, and saw that she did her work well.

And Nancy Ann did yell names through the house in a fearful manner, that shall be admitted.

Mrs. Thompson smiled indulgently on Sarah, and apologized for Nancy.

"She don't know no better, child; folks in this neighborhood is used to yelling around, you know."

"Well, she ought to begin to know better; she goes to school. Professor Pierson is *just as particular* with all the girls! he never says 'Nancy *Ann!*' He don't use but one name for anybody; they never do where folks are educated, I guess. It makes me mad every time I forget and call her 'Nancy Ann.' I just hate it myself."

Thereafter, the patient mother undertook the task of teaching herself to say "Sarah"; she even considered for one entire evening the propriety of her saying "Miss Sarah," and decided that that formality would be unnecessary; but she would like it if "father" would begin to say just "Sarah," and Jim, too. They had ought to when the child hated the other name. The father, being admonished, grum-

bled a little. He did not see why Sarah Jane must take to hating her grandmother's name all of a sudden, but he did his best. A dozen times in the course of the day he began, "Sarah Jane, — er that is to say — Sarah," whereat Jim would, each time, laugh uproariously. He knew his limitations, Jim did, and never, to the end of the chapter, attempted other name than that with which his tongue was familiar.

But "Miss Sarah" undoubtedly improved. Duller eyes and ears than even Jim's would have discovered it. They all knew that she was copying the professor, she knew it herself, and felt no sense of shame thereat. Why not copy one so wise and kind and so entirely her superior? She did not do it in an offensive way, she was not in the least servile; on the rare occasions when she differed decidedly from the professor after she fully understood him, she could argue with him sharply, and hold her own in a way that surprised and interested him. Occasionally she carried her point, and proved herself the wiser of the two. But in speech, and manner, and even in movement, she sometimes consciously and often unconsciously followed his lead, to her marked improvement. Her voice, that had been loud and hearty, was learning the laws of modulation, and Wayne was discovering that it was really a remarkably pleasant voice.

He had his day-dreams about her, this young man. He was interested in her, as he might have been in a hardy plant that he had plucked from the woods and brought home and cultivated. Plants seemed sometimes to change their very natures under such treatment; how far would human beings change? It was an interesting study. Almost of necessity he spent much time with her. Endless were the new schemes to be carried out in connection with the school, and no more eager assistant with them all could be imagined than was Sarah. Moreover, he contrived to find time to give to her for herself alone. She was a fairly good reader, having a natural manner that was pleasant to Wayne; with a few corrections, he felt that she might become an exceptionally good home reader, so he set about making the corrections, and was gratified with his success.

"Suppose you should read aloud to me for a half hour or so each evening, in the book I am reviewing?" he said. "It would rest my eyes, and give you practice in a line that would be helpful to you as a teacher."

"I'd like nothing better in the world," said Sarah, with eagerness; "only that book has French words in it every few pages, and whole lines of it every once in a while. I was looking through it yesterday when I was clearing up your room. I should make worse fuss

with French words than Tommy Carter does with his third reader."

"That ought not to be," said Wayne, with the wisdom of a seer; he felt wise enough at times to be this girl's grandfather, their education and environment had heretofore been in such different worlds. "You will meet French words very often in reading aloud, and I should wish, if I were you, to cultivate that art; you can make good use of it with your friends. Why not take up French as a study, and conquer it?"

"Oh, my land!" said Sarah with one of her sudden lapses into her very recent past, "I couldn't do that; I'm too old. I never had that kind of chances."

"Not at all," said Wayne, briskly, the latter part of the girl's sentence had that note of pitiful regret in it that made him always want to help her. "I don't mean that you shall prepare to teach French, or even to read aloud in it, but one winter's work would be sufficient to make you feel at ease over stray French words that one finds scattered through English, and you could go on, after you had acquired the pronunciation, as far as your time or inclination led you. After one catches the trick of pronunciation, it is only a matter of study and the dictionary. I shall be glad to help you if you care to try."

So the girl tried with all her strength, and was succeeding, as she was quite in the habit of doing, with what she undertook; her teacher was proud of his success as a teacher, and the honest blacksmith had a marked accession of pride in his daughter.

But I started out to tell you of some of Wayne's day-dreams concerning her. He liked to sit by the hour and fancy what effect daily contact with a girl like Enid Wilmer would have on Sarah. Enid, with her soft voice and her movements of quiet grace, and, above all, with her exquisite taste in dress. It was really the dress question that troubled him most. In this sphere he could not hope to do much; he had accomplished something by dint of affecting to dislike certain colors that were especially unbecoming to Sarah, and by mercilessly ridiculing certain combinations of color; that the girl had quickly taken the hints thus given was apparent in the marked improvement of her appearance; but she needed more, needed what he could not do for her and Enid could. He fancied the quick-witted girl developing daily, hourly, under such tuition, and Enid's joy and pleasure in it.

"She is just the sort of girl to delight in such work," he told himself, and he mentally resolved to bring it about. There was another day-dream lying beneath that, infinitely sweeter

than that. Sometime, in that mystic future when he should have secured the college honors that were waiting for him, and proved to his father what manner of man he was, and established a fair home the like unto which there had not been yet in this world, there should be a lovely presiding angel in the home whose name should be Enid. "Enid Pierson," he said the name over softly, reverently, sometimes, when quite alone, not often; it was a sacred dream, it must not be touched rudely even by himself. But it was vivid; and the girl, Sarah, bright, energetic, quick-witted, grown quiet enough of manner and pleasant enough of voice to fit her world, should flit in and out of this paradise, doing her work as a teacher wonderfully well, and consulting constantly with the angel of his home, being guided by her, and being a success in every sense of the word in the higher sphere to which she had been lifted, because he and Enid had prepared her for fitting into it.

He was charmed with the thought, and labored to do his share of the work faithfully and well. He was interested in young Armitage, and in Ruby Knowles, Sarah Jane's "nightingale"; she sang very well, but Wayne had long ago decided that her voice was really not so good as Sarah's own, still he was interested in her, and in a dozen others, and was

making an honest and painstaking effort to help them all he could; but this particular girl he had singled out and invested with a special and steadily increasing interest because she was always being associated in his mind with Enid, and with what Enid could and would do for her. To this end he mentioned her in his letters to Enid, making a sort of foundation for the interest that he intended should be built up by and by, and feeling complacent over the thought that but for him and Enid, the girl might actually have been willing to marry Jim! There was no danger of that now.

Yes, he wrote to Enid; not often, for her letters were rare treasures of his. Her mother had returned now, and she was a wise mother. But he made his letters so wise and safe and friendly, that she did not object to their occasional coming. And her daughter's replies might have been read upon the housetops without winning other than admiration for their brightness. But, *sometime*, he planned to have other letters from her, letters such as should never be shared with any housetop. He could imagine them, and he meant to have them, as fully as he meant to have those belated college honors.

Meantime, his life was not all rose color. He had put a thousand miles between his

mortal enemy and himself, but petty hatred and revenge can reach farther than that. Leon Hamilton had not forgiven his brother for the fearful fright he had given him and all the trouble that followed the exposure of his actual position in college. There had been weeks together when he waited tremblingly, fearing each day lest his stepfather's displeasure should take the form of a withdrawal of his allowance and an order to look out for himself. No such dire results had followed, owing, Leon believed, to his skilful management; but no less did he intend to be revenged upon Wayne for trying to ruin him.

Rumors of a trying nature began to float through the town concerning "the professor's" past history. He had been "suspended from college for inattention to study!" "No, he had been expelled for disgraceful conduct." "No, indeed! he had run away! Why, he got into an awful fuss, and actually killed a man! Probably they were looking for him now!" The story grew, and *grew;* until, when at last it reached Wayne in the form of a solemn Board of Trustees who demanded the right to know the facts, its magnitude almost appalled that angry young man himself. Of course he could make very short work of the stories, and he did. The United States mail was days too slow for his fevered blood;

he telegraphed the dean, the president, three of his favorite professors, begging them to reply at his expense in the same manner. They smiled, these cooler-headed, wiser men, but they were fond of Wayne Pierson, and every one complied with his request, letting the terseness of the telegram aid them in positiveness.

"No young man in this institution ever had a better record."

"We have only one regret, that we lose you from this year's class."

"Too much cannot be said in praise of his character or scholarship." Thus the telegrams read. In some way, it is possible that Squire Willard might have told how, the enterprising reporter of the *Westover Chronicle* got hold of every telegram, and the next day's paper bristled with headlines. "The Brilliant Young Professor Vindicated!" and the like. It was all dreadful. Wayne groaned and writhed under it, but it might have been worse; his popularity was greater than ever, after that; and he had had one revenge. When he handed the last telegram over to Squire Willard as the Chairman of the "Board" he said: "There, Squire Willard, I think those will answer your anxieties; but allow me to say that in my judgment your caution came very late. I might have been the veri-

est scoundrel that my enemy tried to make me appear, for all that you knew to the contrary when you placed me at the head of your school."

The winter was quite gone before Wayne left the little town for even a single night. Then, but two weeks before the summer vacation, he went for a three days' absence. A college friend, with whom he had been quite intimate, was about to be married, and it appeared that the home of the bride-elect was not very far away from Wayne's hiding place; so he had been summoned to serve as "best man" at the wedding ceremony.

During his absence, Sarah was to assume the reins of government at the red schoolhouse; but by this time the peculiar system of self-government after which Wayne had striven was so well understood in the school that no anxiety was felt on the part of either teacher.

"Our school has been made over," said the assistant teacher, complacently; "it manages itself." And Squire Willard replied with equal complacence: "I reckon that's so; I knew what I was about when I hired that chap, I tell you! The telegrams were all very well, and I'm glad, for the sake of the ninnies, that he got 'em, but I didn't need 'em, bless you! *I* knew."

The young man on the car platform looked about him with an air of complacence, too. Who would have imagined that he would stay so long in that little town and become such a force in it as he knew he was? Certain of the older "boys" were lingering near, and blushed with pleasure and lifted their hats in return for his greeting, and said "Good-by, Professor, wish you a good time." They would not have known enough to lift their hats last fall. They would have stared and chuckled, or at best merely nodded, with their hands in their pockets. It was a small difference, perhaps, but a significant one; it stood for many others. With what different feelings he should reach the little station next Wednesday from those he had had when he first arrived!

The mental statement was truer than he supposed. The state of mind in which he returned to the village was not one to be envied. He was pushing through, or, more properly speaking perhaps, had passed through what he believed was the fiercest blow that his stormy life had yet given him. Yet it was represented by only a few words.

"So our friend Hamilton is to take to himself a wife, before long, is he?" This his college friend had said to him as they stood together on the evening of the wedding, going

over old times. He knew something of the feeling with which Wayne regarded his stepmother, and had been by no means a friend of Leon himself.

"I don't know 'really,'" Wayne had said with a little start of surprise; he had not thought of such complications. "I am not in correspondence with that individual, and haven't been posted. Whom is he to victimize?"

"I don't know the lady. Alice has met her, and thinks her charming. It is a Miss Wilmer, I believe — Enid Wilmer — singular name that, isn't it?"

There had been more talk, but Wayne had not heard it. This, then, was Leon's last horrible piece of revenge! He could not doubt but that the villain had in some way — in the wildness of his excitement he did not stop to explain to himself how — learned of his feeling for this girl and shaped his course accordingly! At the time, I think it would not have been possible for Wayne Pierson to have given his stepbrother credit for having a true motive or a true thought upon any subject.

Fierce as his mood was, he could not but be somewhat soothed with the manner of his reception. The boys were at the train in full force, and gave a glad cheer as he stepped

from the platform. One seized his grip, another his package of books, and umbrella; they would have carried him on their shoulders if he would have let them. At the blacksmith's there was no less hearty joy in his coming.

"Welcome home," Sarah had said, in the doorway; she wore a white dress, and her bright eyes had a softened brightness in them that was very becoming.

"Well," said the good blacksmith as he grasped and held the hand of the professor with painful energy, "so you've got back? I reckon we're glad; not that we haven't got along all right, we've made things hum in the school, same as when you were here. Sarah Ja-ah-*Sarah*, she's a master hand, if I do say it that shouldn't. But it ain't all *school*, you know; not half of it. Sho! you know that better than I do. It beats all, Professor, what a hold you've got on the girl. It would kill me, I reckon, if I didn't believe in you through and through; or else I'd kill *you*, I'm afraid. Sho! I'm talking nonsense, you know; but my heart is jest bound up in her and so's her mother's. We had ambitions for her, I'll allow; but we never did expect that she'd marry a real out-and-out professor, and a brilliant one at that, as the *Westover Chronicle* says you are; and I believe 'em, too."

XV.

"Do you really mean it?"

IT is impossible to describe the amazement and chagrin of Wayne Pierson on hearing words like these addressed to himself. He was thankful that they two stood alone in the hall, and that the din of the supper bell prevented other ears from hearing through the open door.

Supper in this house was wont to be a cheerful meal to which Mother Thompson often added a little surprise in the shape of some favorite dainty of her most excellent cookery. The young teacher, with healthy appetite, had usually done it full justice,—somehow the cold pork and cabbage had drifted of late down to the lower end of the table, convenient to Jim's more substantial requirements, —to-night the table was almost festive in its outlay: there was chicken with toast and cream gravy, peach preserves, and a raisin cake, of which the professor was quite fond. What, then, was the dismay of mother and daughter when he appeared in the doorway to say that

as he had dined quite late he should need nothing more that night.

"For pity's sake!" exclaimed Mrs. Thompson, "and here I went and got up a nice supper a-purpose to welcome you home. Better set down and have a cup of tea and a piece of cake, leastways."

But that young man excused himself with a smile so genial and a bow so deferential that the good woman felt complimented despite her disappointment. Her mother heart went out to Sarah, though, when she took note that her face had suddenly clouded over. "Too bad!" she said to herself, "when she looked so pretty in her white dress an' took such pains a-settin' the table." And then the mother sighed, as it that was the lot of woman, to plan and try to please a man and fail, but she cast anxious glances at her girl, who ate sparingly and did not talk. It was well that her father was interested in hearing about a lawsuit from Jim, who had just returned from Westover, or he would have then and there inquired into the cause of Sarah's silence.

When the evening wore on and the professor did not come down to sing or be read to, though the big lamp was lighted and a fire on the hearth glowed cheerily, the mother excused him by saying, "Most likely that poor boy is all tired out, and is going to bed early; I'll fix a little

bite and you take it up to his door." It would have been like the breezy, independent Sarah Jane to have advised her mother to do no such thing, and that if he didn't choose to come after his supper, let him go without it; but Sarah was cast in gentler mould. The change seemed to have come when that obnoxious "Jane" had been dropped. She took the tray spread with biscuit, cold chicken, and cake, with a glass of milk, and going upstairs, set it down noiselessly at Wayne's door, knocked on it, then disappeared quickly into another room.

Mrs. Thompson was listening at the foot of the stairs. That way of doing things was no plan of hers, she expected to have the tray presented in person. But that was not the daughter's way; it might have been once, but Sarah knew better now. Some mysterious influence had been at work developing womanly delicacy and reserve. Wayne recognized this as he opened the door and took up the tray; he guessed who had brought it. Mrs. Thompson would not have so effaced herself. His heart smote him as he surveyed the lunch and realized that it was tender care for him which prompted it. He had all his life sighed for loving appreciation; now it had come, and he felt like flinging it from him.

He had been sitting in the dark thinking over those dreadful words. What had he done

to delude this father into believing that he had any such intention? Marrying, in his mind, was a far-away beautiful dream that might never be realized. Years of hard, self-denying work were to come first. He went over the past winter in thought. There had been absolutely nothing that any sane person could call serious attention bestowed upon his assistant. He would have been willing that the whole village should hear every word he had ever spoken to her. He should not allow himself to be disturbed further by the banter of an ignorant man. It was too preposterous — and he dismissed the subject, or tried to.

There was another something that disturbed him more than that just now, and that was the report of Enid's engagement to Leon. Could it be possible that it was true? If so, it must have been brought about by the urgent wishes of their elders as far as Enid was concerned, for she had seemed to feel nothing but repulsion for him. But then, who could sound the depths of the heart of a young girl? Leon's handsome face may have had some fascination for her which she had carefully concealed. Moreover, Leon was equal to anything; he might have professed to have been greatly changed, even to have become a Christian after Enid's own heart, and in need of her sweet guiding to keep him in the narrow path. That would

appeal to her as nothing else could. It came over Wayne Pierson all at once that life looked dark ahead without that precious, dreamy hope he had hidden in his heart all these months.

He reached out his hand for a box on the table. Among his other treasures was the keepsake she had given him at parting — a little withered white rose. There was a lingering perfume about it still; it reminded him of her. He pictured her again handing it to him that morning, not coquettishly, but with innocent, true eyes. How dreadful that this white dove of a girl should be in the power of a vulture! He would write and warn her; but not to-night, he must be calmer. It was a night of tossing and unrest for the young man; in dreams he was striving to hold Enid back from the edge of a precipice at whose foot lay dark, deep waters; and then he was being pursued through tangled growths of swamp and wood by Father Thompson, who brandished a huge sledge-hammer over his head.

The young teacher did not go to his duties that morning with his usual zest. All through that day the undercurrent of distracting thought went on. It was most humiliating that this man had all winter supposed him to be engaged in "courting" his daughter! How should he disabuse their minds of such a belief? Sarah was sensible; it was not likely that she had a

thought of such a thing. She was interested in her lessons; besides, she knew that he had neither by word or look led her to believe that he had for her any other feeling than that of mere friendliness.

Wayne Pierson, by reason of his peculiar life trials, was older than his years in some respects, but in others he was not so worldly wise as he might have been. Even if he had ever thought himself old enough to begin, he would have scorned the thought of a flirtation, albeit some of the arts a flirt employs were natural to him. His eyes would have widened and glowed, though, and sought the other pair of eyes when deeply interested, just the same, whether he had been talking with his grandmother or a pretty girl. Then that grace of manner and thoughtful courtesy, more fascinating to a woman than good looks, and a revelation to this girl, deceived her. It all testified to tender regard for herself; and these subtle, silent factors had naturally not been taken into account by him.

As the days went on it became evident to Wayne that Mrs. Thompson was of the same mind as her husband, for she assumed toward him an unwonted familiarity bordering upon motherly relations. And to his extreme annoyance, now that he had become sensitive on the subject, the air of the whole community

seemed full of the same thing. The scholars gave knowing nods and nudges to each other if he and his assistant happened to exchange a few words. And Squire Willard even went so far as to congratulate him in a way, hailing him as he went by his office with: —

"Hello, Professor! — heard some good news about you! See here, if you and Sarah Jane are going to couple up soon, why can't you come back here and keep our school next winter? Maybe we can all put our heads together and have a first-rate academy or something of that sort, bimeby. There's money enough in all these farms to pay you something nice, eventooaly. Why not settle down here? Think of it, won't you?"

Wayne was relieved that a man just then stepped in and asked to see the squire on business, so cutting short the interview. Had the young man not been so incensed and mortified, he would have enjoyed a hearty laugh as he went on his way at thought of himself marrying Sarah Jane and settling down in Hardin — the "upper deestrict" at that. His duties for that day were over, and striking off into a little footpath which led to the woods, he wondered grimly as he went along why it was that he had been all his life tramping off to hide away with some trouble. Was it, had it always been, his own fault? But he could not stop to

puzzle over that, there was this latest perplexity harassing him night and day. Gradually he had come to regard that half-divine precept — "put yourself in his place," and he had faint glimpses of how the case might stand in the minds of Sarah's father and mother. It was like this: —

All winter long there had been a fire in the best room every evening — a thing unheard of before — Sarah and "her young man" had sat there alone. They had sung and studied French and read aloud; the sceptical parents were wont to nod knowingly at each other when these studies and readings were mentioned, a mere excuse that to be together they decided. Sometimes when the book proved intensely interesting they took no note of time, and the reading was protracted until a late hour. Then the father, rousing from his first nap, and still hearing the sound of voices, was apt to remark, "Sarah Jane ought to 'a' been abed two hours ago;" and the mother would put in soothingly, "La, father, young folks are only young once, do let them enjoy it." The professor had also escorted Sarah to and from the singing classes and debates, and sometimes to a sociable. All the neighborhood took it as a thing of course that she would appear with him; her rustic admirers recognized it too, and stood aside.

Now in the rural community of New England, whence the Thompsons and many others of this Western village had emigrated, this was the regular recognized form of a genuine courtship, and equivalent to an engagement when persisted in for a few months. When a young man had begun "keeping company" with a girl, especially if he had "set up" with her, it would be accounted most dishonorable to "jilt" her after that. The remembrance of this fact, gleaned from a book of old-time stories, explained why everybody had jumped to the same conclusion concerning himself, and did not comfort this much troubled young man. Putting many little things together, he could see that for some time back the Thompsons had seemed to regard him as one of the family. It had come to be a rule for the mother to trot into the room where Sarah and he sat together about nine o'clock in the evening, bringing some little delicacy for their refreshment. She would mend the fire, beam serenely upon them a moment, and vanish. The unsuspecting young man set it all down to abounding kindness of heart, and took encouragement to prolong the reading after his conscience had warned him that he ought to be asleep.

It cannot be denied that Sarah, during that winter, had enjoyed the opportunity of her life in an educational way, even though some of

what she read was far beyond her depth. It embraced a wide range: books of history, science, and metaphysics, with a sprinkling of fiction by the best authors. And the listener had realized his good fortune in having secured a reader so good-natured and untiring; her voice was good also, and she was eager to have all faults corrected. The long winter evenings had slipped delightfully away, and Wayne was grateful, for he knew that his already overtaxed eyes could not have borne this extra strain. He had occasionally rewarded her by reading aloud choice bits from the poets. A new world had already been opened to the girl, but this was enchantment to hear in Wayne's faultless intonation —

"Where the quiet-colored end of evening smiles
Miles and miles,
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half asleep
Tinkle homeward through the twilight," —

or the musical cadences of —

"The blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depths
Of waters stilled at even."

And thus it had turned out that the reading for a half-hour a day had come to be the busi-

ness of the evening after a short lesson in French, and an occasional music lesson. He had to thank his own selfish thoughtlessness, he told himself more than once, that he had been brought into such a dilemma. He had taught French to Sarah, so that his pronunciation should not grow rusty; in fact, it was all selfish; he had enjoyed posing as a sort of philanthropist, wise and good and gracious, giving out his gifts with princely generosity. And so he had gone on all winter with not a thought of anybody but himself. Fool! If only the girl herself were not harmed; he should never have dreamed of such a thing but for the talk that had been started.

The evenings at home were necessarily broken up now by reason of frequent rehearsals of the whole school, preparatory to the closing exercises, and the teacher contrived to be so continually occupied that he had no time to give to Sarah except in thought. The conflict within went steadily on. "What was to be the end of all this?" he asked himself. His eyes at times regarded the girl, who was the cause of all this tumult, with a new curiosity. Most persons would have called her good-looking. Somehow during the winter she had lost a superabundance of flesh, and the intense color which had flamed in her cheeks was toned down to a becoming pink.

Her brown eyes were sincere, though rather too wide open, perhaps, and she walked with a free swinging step which might be trained into grace. No, there was nothing in her appearance to terrify him, and she really had a very good mind susceptible to high cultivation. But oh, that something in the face and presence, that delicacy and fineness, the spirit illumining the flesh, it was not there! Again he thought of Enid and stifled a groan. At the same time it smote him like a blow that this other girl was thoroughly good, kind, pure-hearted, and unselfish. She had anticipated every want and ministered to his comfort like a sister, taking burdens upon herself in the school which did not belong to her that he might not be annoyed.

It was after weary trampings, sleepless nights, and many conflicts that he came at last to this decision: If he should discover that Sarah, in view of what she considered special attention, had given her heart to him, why then it would be his duty to pledge himself to her. The thought was terrible, but he must be honorable and true to his convictions, whatever the sacrifice. He had written an essay in college wherein he had taken high ground on the perfidy of stealing hearts, denouncing the guilty ones as worthy of far greater punishment than ordinary thieves. He would wait, though, until the last day or two of his

stay before taking this decisive step, and watch developments. He was not reassured when he found that evening a lovely bunch of white violets and spring beauties in his room, nor when the next day he stepped into her schoolroom to make an inquiry, her face became suffused with blushes and she made stammering replies, increased by a loud whisper from a precocious little woman gossip who proclaimed from behind her hand — "He's her beau," — followed by a giggle.

It was all over; the last day of school came and went with highly creditable examinations, followed by a "brilliant" entertainment in the evening, consisting of music and declamation which covered them all with glory, especially the professor, whom a throng of boys gathered about to clasp his hand in loving good-bys, and beg him to return the next winter. It was not that young man's purpose to do so if any other place opened where he could earn his living, but he left it an open question; he might be obliged to accept it.

Wayne had planned to take the midnight train, and there was but an hour left. Mother Thompson, with unfailing kindness, had prepared for him a generous lunch-box for his journey, and when she presented it, begged as a last favor that he would sing her favorite song before he went. The musician, as he seated

himself at the organ to comply with her request, was conscious of a wish that the writer of those words had never been born. Annoyed beyond measure, he nevertheless went through it, singing as effectively as if his heart were torn with regrets, the old song, beginning: —

"We parted in silence, we parted by night."

With the last line Mrs. Thompson left the room in tears. There was silence for a little when the two were left alone. Wayne had felt that this last talk would probably decide his course of action, and yet, within the last few minutes, the suggestion had come to him — What need for pledging himself to her now in any case? Why not wait and arrange to correspond simply? Of course that would be, in the eyes of her friends, still continuing a tacit engagement, but it would not seem so dreadful to him, and who could tell what might happen meantime? The girl might be carried captive by the next teacher and forget him utterly.

"It's dreadful to have you go away; I never had such a good time in all my life," Sarah said innocently. "I was beginning to be somebody and know something. Now I'll just drop back and be Sarah Jane again. I was getting on so well in music and French, and now there'll be no more of that. I'll have nobody to help me, ever again."

The girl was leaning her head on her hand, her eyes on Wayne's face, as one takes a last lingering look at something infinitely precious. Wayne had a tender heart for distress in whatever guise, and now pity sent that regardful look into his eyes, so misleading it was, as he said: —

"I will help you. I will be your friend always, if you will let me." He was going on to say more, that he would write to her regularly, and continue her French lessons by correspondence. But when that treacherous voice of his, with the tender note, which was always saying more than he had authorized it to say, fell upon the girl's ear in those words, the absolute radiance that flashed into her face was something wonderful to see. "Her friend always," with that look and tone, meant just one thing to her.

"Do you really mean it?" she asked in a tremble of delight. "I was afraid you would never like me enough for that, I — I know I'm not good enough for you, but I'll try and learn."

She had mistaken his meaning! He saw it in a flash. And now he was pledged unless he spoke and undeceived her. He could not do it. He must abide by his words as she had understood them. And she had not feigned this to entrap him; she was a child of nature, and true.

XVI.

A Counterfeiter's State of Mind.

IT was a strange wooing; Wayne Pierson indeed was too young to realize how strange it was. He smiled into the face of the girl who questioned him eagerly,—it was an acquirement of his to smile when his heart was heaviest,—and he took her hand and pressed it reassuringly, then dropped it as it came to him that he was acting more than he felt. He spoke a few grave words too, words of advice mostly, concerning studies, with hints of the years of hard work which lay before him. Then train-time came. He clasped Sarah's hand in good-by, and she watched him down the street until he was lost in the darkness.

It must be confessed that Sarah was disappointed at first. Why did he not say he loved her as they do in story books, and kiss her good-by? However, she loyally put away the feeling of dissatisfaction; perhaps refined people like Wayne did not do things in that way. She said the name over again softly, thrilling

with the thought that now she had a right to call him that, though with it came a twinge of regret that he had not told her she might; anyway she should say it to herself. And to think she should get letters from him! She had never received but three letters in her life. How often did people who were engaged write to each other, she wondered. It would be so great a pleasure to answer his letter, for Sarah prided herself on spelling and penmanship as well as grammar. But she had no nice paper; she must send to Westover for some. "Let's see, shall it be blue or pink or green?" She could not decide.

And the other party to this queer transaction? He was not troubled by any such trivial matters as he sat straight up in a common car all night, to save the expense of a sleeper, being moved rapidly on toward the East. He was busy at something else — not sleeping, but calling himself "fool" and other hard names; not because of what had just happened, that was unavoidable, he told himself, albeit it was the result of a winter of insane thoughtlessness. It would have been dishonorable as things turned to have acted in any other way. He had seemed to seek out one girl and devote himself to her; naturally enough she had inferred that he had peculiar interest in her, and her heart had gone out to him. Duty required

of him what he had done that night, and brave men did not shirk duty, however hard.

The deluded boy did not seem to realize that duty and truth go hand in hand, and he had forgotten his beloved Shakespeare: —

> "To thine own self be true;
> And it must follow as the night the day
> Thou canst not then be false to any man."

He was yet to learn by hard lessons that one cannot pass counterfeits in the sacred relations of love and marriage, and go unpunished.

Aunt Crete had invited Wayne to spend the summer with her, and thither he had gone with all speed, as she wished him to be there on his birthday. He decided, as he drew near the old homestead among the hills, that he should not at present inform Aunt Crete of any peculiar relations he held with a young woman in the West; time enough for that most humiliating avowal.

The quaint old house was open to the May sunshine, and lilac blooms of white and lavender mingled their sweet breaths with apple blossoms and the thousand other fragrancies of spring. It was a delightful, peaceful spot, embowered in ancient elms, that line the wide streets of that ideal village. Aunt Crete welcomed him with shining face and loving words, bestowing kisses on cheek and brow with demonstrativeness unu-

sual to her. It was grateful to the young man. He was weary of tossings and buffetings and harassments; he felt, almost, like a worn old man who longed to drop his burdens in this peaceful spot and there rest forever, or like a tired child who wanted to creep into his mother's arms and be rocked to sleep.

Wayne's feelings were never on the surface, though; he assumed a cheerful air and rushed about, out and in, exploring the old place anew with all the apparent delight of his boyhood. He had never seen Aunt Crete more happy, and she knew why. Not only had her dear boy come to stay for months, but locked in the old secretary drawer was a long thick envelope whose seals looked official and important. To-morrow he would know all.

And the morrow dawned in brightness. Aunt Crete dressed the house in flowers and brought out the traditional birthday cake with its twenty-one candles, and gave her little gifts as when he was a boy: a fine handkerchief of her own hemstitching, a bright pinball, and a box of her home-made taffy. Tears came to the young man's eyes. Again he was back in his happy mothered childhood.

He took up the formidable looking document, finally, asking, "What can this be, Aunt Crete? Have you made your will so soon?" She was silent while he opened it, expecting

to find in it some of Aunt Crete's dry fun, perhaps a whole sheet full of good advice.

He read far enough to understand that he held in his hand his fortune; then he looked up and gazed at Aunt Crete in dumb amazement before reading it again in silence. Meantime Aunt Crete slipped out and left him alone.

After a half-hour had passed she was a little perplexed and disappointed that he had not come out, beside himself with joy, to jump over the tulip bed, or seize her and whirl her about, which were some of his pranks when he had come down from college to spend short vacations. He took it altogether too coolly. Was Wayne putting on airs and trying to be old and grave before his time?

Whatever it was that kept back an overflow of spirits on that eventful day, it was something real, Aunt Crete decided when she returned to the room and found Wayne sitting where she had left him, his head bent forward in deep thought, his eyes intent upon a pattern in the carpet; he looked as if he were puzzling out a problem, she thought, and not a pleasant one at that. The boy had grown up! And Aunt Crete, with all her pride in his manly beauty and talent, had a sore heart for a minute as she took it in. It would have been sorer, though, could she have known all.

He caught at her hand as she came by, and smiled up into her face. It was her boy's look still, but graver, sadder. She passed her hand caressingly over his head and put back a stray lock from his forehead, thinking within herself that if any mother loved a boy more than she did this one, she was sorry for her.

He drew her down into an easy chair by his side, and began to ply her with eager questions. Among others he asked, "Aunt Crete, did you all these years know of this — this wonderful thing that was coming to me?"

"Oh, yes; didn't I keep a secret well?"

"Why did you not tell me? Some things might have been different if you had."

"Most likely. You would probably have turned out as many another boy has, a good-for-nothing, because you had some money coming to you. Besides, I couldn't tell you. I gave my word to your mother that I would not."

"If I had known it," he said meditatively, "I would have come to you last fall, and gone on with my studies by myself, while I waited for all this abundance. If I had" — he almost said, "if I had, this terrible yoke of bondage would not be about my neck this minute."

"Yes," Aunt Crete answered, in an aggrieved tone, "if I had but known you were going to fly up and off like a parched pea I should have

insisted upon your coming to me. However, I consoled myself by thinking that you couldn't probably have a better discipline for a time than to teach a country school."

"Discipline, yes, lifelong discipline it might be," the young man told himself.

"But that's all past," Aunt Crete said briskly. "Now you have your life to plan over again, I know you are just aching to get off by yourself and think and think, to take it all in; so tramp off if you want to till dinner's ready, and I'll go down to old Mrs. Bower's with some broth."

Wayne blessed her for her thoughtfulness. He did wish to be alone for a time, and gloom over the situation. He had been wretched before this news came, but doubly wretched now. It was so tantalizing, so exasperating, that now when he was free from his enemy and had become his own master, when he held in his hand the means to go on with study to any extent, to travel in foreign lands, what he had longed for, when a charmed life was opening up before him, it should be turned to bitterness by his own folly, fettered in his young manhood by a chain of his own forging. Suppose even that he could tolerate the thought of being bound to this girl, how was she in her humble home ever to be fitted for that station in life to which he belonged? It was appalling.

He felt degraded, too, in his own eyes that she had given to him her whole heart's devotion and received naught in return. It was not a light thing to have won this, and it was by his own mistakes; he might have saved her from it.

Wayne had expected to spend this summer in efforts to obtain a more lucrative position, but now there was no need. Study was the next thing, and with that joyful thought the student got the better of all depressing circumstances, for a time, and he went off into making plans. He would go to one of the older universities to be graduated, after that a post-graduate course in Europe, after that travel. Then what? Oh, what? And this brought his thoughts back to the hateful present, and the remembrance that he had promised Sarah to let her know of his safe arrival. He took out his pen and tablet to begin. What should he say, and how? Engaged but three days, and obliged to ponder in perplexity over what he should say in his first letter. He saw the absurdity of the situation, and half smiled in scorn of himself. He sat long on the log, pen in hand, leaning against the tree, but he did not write the letter; with eyes fixed on the blue sky and dreamy white clouds he had gone off into dreams himself; there was no girl in the dreams, they were about books. Oh, the

treasures of books he would have! He revelled in the thought of his riches, and made out a choice list of rare books at once.

A day or two elapsed before he set himself in earnest to write to Sarah. It was a difficult task. Part of the epistle might have been copied from "The Polite Letter-Writer," so stilted and devoid of heart interest was it. Much of it had to do with French verbs. He was more at home there, and some of the sentences were written in French for that poor creature to puzzle out by the aid of a dictionary. At the close there was some quite plain English, however. He wrote that, having had time for reflection, it had occurred to him that he should have been more explicit about a matter at which he had merely hinted. Realizing that it would be years, with his long cherished plans for a thorough education, before he could marry — the boy writhed under using that word, but there was no other — he felt the importance of impressing upon her, with utmost frankness, that the waiting time would be long, and much of it spent in a foreign land. If she felt that so protracted an engagement was undesirable, he would not hold her to it; she was free when she chose to say the word. He did not feel it right to continue it unless she clearly understood it was for tedious years. Perhaps it was all wrong for

her to sacrifice her youth in this way. If Wayne had a secret hope that the simple-minded girl and her friends might become awed at the prospect of great learning and high position, as well as dismayed in view of an apparently interminable engagement, and shrink therefrom, he did not tell it to his inner self.

Sarah Thompson knew that she could not expect to receive a letter under two or three days, at least; nevertheless she began to look for it the second day after Wayne's departure. It was the first thought in the morning and the last at night. As the week dragged by, and it had not yet come, the hitherto strong-nerved, cheerful girl began to be depressed and nervous, seized with a fit of trembling when mail-time came, and dropping everything to hurry off to the post-office.

It came at last, and she fled to her own room to read it, holding it a few seconds unopened, and gazing at her own name in that dear handwriting. There was not much in it to give her comfort. But the fact that he had written to her at all, that she was the only one who had received word from him, that he called her "dear friend" at the beginning and signed himself "your friend" at the close, that was joy enough for now. How could he think she would ever tire of waiting for him?

That showed how honest and kind he was, though, to tell her the exact truth at the start. A more sensitive nature would, of course, have read between the lines, and taken offence at the mere suggestion of considering herself free. But this girl had an idol, and he was infallible in her eyes.

When she read parts of her letter aloud to her father and mother that night, it was not quite so satisfactory to them.

"It's queer for a love-letter, ain't it?" Mother Thompson said to her husband, after Sarah had gone to her room; "but then, most likely she didn't want to read the love part out. He's a-goin' to be a great scholar, though. Goin' to Europe! I want to know!" she mused on, more to herself than to her husband! "My! But Sarah Jane 'll be somebody great when she gets him."

Father Thompson had been meditatively rubbing his stubbly chin while he gazed into the fire with something like a frown on his broad face, and he sighed now, ending in an audible Huh! then answered almost bitterly: "Maybe; ef she ain't most a hundred year old time he gets good ready. I tell ye, Mariar, I don't mor'n half like this business. Courtin' a girl ten or twelve year; it mostways ends in smoke, then where is she? Been a-mopin' an' a-pinin' an' a-losin' her good looks. Sho!

I wish he'd never laid eyes on her. He scart away Sam Scott. An' I most wish she hadn't got the idee of so much learnin' into her head, an' had a married Sam an' settled down nigh us. Why, Sam's got the best farm on all these prairies, an' he's a likely fellow too."

"Now, father," Mother Thompson said, as she rolled up her knitting-work for the night, "you've got to let young folks steer their own boat. Providence 'll manage what you can't, and we needn't worry anything about it. But for pity's sake, Isaiah, don't let out anything of this to Sarah Jane; it'll just about kill her if you do."

It was a perfect morning with summer airs, and Wayne lounged in a hammock under a big tree, by turns dipping into the pages of a book and pausing to take in the delights of flitting birds and scent of apple blossoms. Aunt Crete appeared in the doorway presently with a knife and a pan, asking: "Wayne, are you equal to cutting some asparagus for dinner? You remember where the old bed is down in the garden, don't you?"

Next to Aunt Crete's house stood another large old-fashioned mansion, half hidden by trees with spacious grounds, and old-time garden at the back. Wayne, going on his errand, stopped by the fence between the two gardens to admire the wealth of bloom on the other

side,—great beds of tulips and daffodils glowing in morning freshness. To his surprise somebody who seemed a part of the spring morning, in a gown of sprigged cambric and a little white ruffled sunbonnet, lifted herself up from over the flowers she was cutting. Face to face they came — Enid Wilmer and Wayne Pierson, each pronouncing the other's name in the same breath and in unfeigned delight. Wayne was the first to find his speech. "Where did you come from, and how in the name of all that's wonderful did you find this out-of-the-way place?" he asked.

"I came from home only last night. Aunt Serena lives here, and mother and I have come to spend the summer. The doctor thinks the air of these Berkshire hills is just what she needs. There, I accounted for myself all in one breath; now may I ask you the same questions?"

"Oh, yes; I have come to spend the summer too, and Aunt Crete lives here." Then their gay laughter floated out over those old gardens that had not echoed to the sound of young voices for years, and Enid exclaimed, "How strange! how very nice!"

There followed a talk over that garden fence, so long continued that Aunt Crete was obliged to come in search of her nephew and her asparagus.

The young man had learned one thing by that talk — to his comfort or discomfort. In

the inquiries Enid had made concerning his father's family, it was evident by her manner of speaking of Leon, that the report he had heard of the two was utterly false. It had probably been fabricated by that fellow, and circulated through the college that it might reach his ears.

But for this hateful rumor, he told himself as he came back to the hammock, perhaps he might not have been bound by any promises; for he began to realize that it had plunged him into a state of despairing recklessness that probably had much to do with his hasty decision to sacrifice himself to a sense of duty. Was it duty after all? Why had he not waited and counselled with somebody older and wiser? He had not even the settled conviction that he was suffering for conscience' sake, since these disturbing thoughts had gained entrance.

He could not be wholly wretched now, though, that he had seen that lovely face far back in the little sunbonnet. He recalled her joy at meeting him, and dwelt with delight upon her every word. From this pleasant dreaming he was awakened by Aunt Crete calling: —

"A letter for you, Wayne;" and she gave him a quizzical look as she handed it out — a little fat, pink letter.

"Horrors! Pink!" and the young man flushed as he recognized Sarah's handwriting.

XVII.

Educating a Conscience.

THAT "pink letter" which was such a source of mortification to Wayne was not by any means a letter to be ashamed of. Sarah Thompson, by reason of the limitations of her education, might not know just the proper color of paper to use in polite correspondence, but she knew how to write a genial, newsy letter, expressed in such a way that the reader might almost imagine himself present at the scenes described. Given the fact that Wayne Pierson had been undeniably interested in many of his late pupils and had done his best for the little Western town where he had spent his winter, and it will be readily understood that he might be interested in a well-written letter from that place. If he could have divested himself of all thought of personality in connection with it, he would have heartily enjoyed Sarah's letter. He imagined himself going down to Aunt Crete with certain paragraphs in it that described the last "sewing society," and gave a lively and effective

picture of Western life as he had been living it. If when Aunt Crete said, "Who writes the letter?" he could reply unconcernedly, "Oh, one of my pupils who is really a very promising scholar," he would go to her at once. Less than two weeks ago he could have made some such reply; now, he was sure that the telltale blood would flow into his face, and that his aunt's keen eyes would ferret out his ugly secret; for that it was ugly, every added day of Enid Wilmer's society assured him.

No, there was no enjoyment to be had from Sarah's letter. He put it from him in pain and disgust. However, in due course of time it was followed by others, not all of them pink; some were of a pale green, others had a delicate tint called "azure" by the stationer at Westover; it had especially charmed Sarah, and she used it somewhat liberally. Yet there came a time, and only that subtle instinct which seemed to be at work moulding her life could have told why it came, when Sarah used the pink and green and azure paper for her every-day friends, and sent only plain white to Wayne. He had not hinted at this; instinctively he shrank from tutelage of the sort, his face burning with shame over the idea that it should be necessary. But the white sheet and the white envelope that went to her with careful precision every two weeks told their story, it may be.

Yes, he wrote to her with painstaking exactness, sending his letter every other Monday morning. If he had failed in this, his curiously tutored conscience would have tortured him. For after carefully going once more over the weary ground he had assured himself that there was nothing for him but to abide by his pledged word. Others had been martyrs to principle before now, why not he?

Yet it must be owned that he was a very cheerful and comfortable martyr. Having resolved upon doing his duty at whatever cost, why should he not have a little cheer on the way? It would be years before he could think of settling down to actual life; years of study were before him, but he had surely earned a short vacation, and for this brief summer he would forget that he was other than a boy on a visit to his aunt, and that there was a girl on a visit to her aunt who would naturally look to him for friendly companionship. Could anything be more natural and innocent? He did not plan out the summer and look at it steadily, he merely let it float dreamily through his brain, contenting his conscience with the stern orders to Fancy never to take him down the lane marked, "It might have been." In other words he drifted, all that summer, often calling a halt, it is true; as often, indeed, as the fortnightly letter was written, and making

certain stern resolutions, forgotten as soon as he heard Enid's voice in the garden next door. For the most part he was content to drift, and if he had been so ill taught as not to know that drifting always led down-stream, who shall be blamed?

Those many colored letters that came so regularly, tried him much at first, until he hit upon this plan, without letting himself know that it was a plan. He talked much with Aunt Crete and with Enid about his pupils. He told them of "Beet," and of one, John Loomis, who had interested him, and of Ruby Stevens, with her unfortunately good voice, since it was not better, and of little Nellie Parsons, with her dangerously pretty face and her innocence of danger. He corresponded with some of them, he said, and should, for a time, to try to keep a hold upon them; at least, until some teacher came who could take up the work where he left it. He did not mention Sarah, and he said nothing about the pink and blue letters. Could he help it if Aunt Crete believed that she had received their explanation? And adoring her boy as she did, was it not natural for her to tell it all over to Enid and dilate a little upon the unusual quality of helpfulness and protectiveness for those "youngsters out West," and he so young himself? As for those fortnightly letters, Wayne

posted them sometimes at the village and oftener at the town office six miles away. When he went for his morning gallop it was as easy to go in that direction as any other, and he did not allow any impertinent questions from his conscience as to why he took the trouble to carry his letters there to post. He was doing right, he told it coldly, at a great sacrifice of self, and that was enough.

His home relations during the summer were peculiar. He went dutifully home as soon as he had fully established himself at Aunt Crete's, and meant to be magnanimous and forget all the pain that his father had given him; but he began wrong. His father had longed with an almost pitiful eagerness for the home-coming of his boy; he had meant to put his arms about him in the first moment of privacy, as he used to do when Wayne was thirteen, and to say, "Wayne, my boy, we haven't understood each other very well of late, but your father loves you with all his heart." But there had been no privacy; they had met in the presence of company, and Wayne had risen with an ease that was almost indifference — at least so the father thought — to take his hand for a moment, and say, "I hope you are quite well?" and then to continue at once the conversation that the father's entrance had interrupted. Nor even when they were alone did

the son succeed in making himself understood. Throughout the winter he had been haunted with that fear which had taken possession of him that his father was suffering from losses, or heavy expenditures. He knew that his was an expensive household, and could well believe that Leon Hamilton had not improved in the matter of spending money. Almost his first thought, after recovering from the astonishment into which the announcement of his own fortune had thrown him, had been that now he should be able to help his father. He had planned a dozen ways of offering that help, and then, without plan, had hit upon the worst way that could have been found.

"Father," he had said, the moment they were alone together, "you know of my rare good fortune, of course? you have known it all the while. My chief pleasure in it is that now I can repay to you all the lavish expenditure of the years. Can you give me any idea, do you suppose, what the amount should be?"

He had smiled as he spoke the words, and had meant to express by them the utter folly of trying to repay with mere money such care as had been his. He thought his father would understand that he pretended to throw a thin veil of business over the transaction, so as to cover the humiliation of a father, still in the prime of life, having to receive at the hands of

a son. If, instead of this, he had only said: "Oh, father, are you having money troubles? I have been afraid of it, and have lain awake nights wondering how I could help you; now it is such a joy to me to think that I can! How much do you need, father, to set everything straight?" But he said nothing of the kind; and no one could have misunderstood his meaning more thoroughly than did that father. So the boy, his boy, had come home still nursing petty anger in his heart, and had planned the mean revenge of offering to pay him for his bringing up! Well, if that was his spirit, the least said between them the better. He had smiled in return, a smile so cold that it chilled Wayne's heart, as he said with that touch of irony that he knew well how to use: —

"I am not mathematician enough to compute such a sum as that, and do not care to undertake it. The fewer words we have about it the better for us both." And then he had turned abruptly and gone into the inner room and closed the door. "He is utterly set against me!" groaned Wayne, inwardly; "he will not even let me help him!"

As for Mrs. Pierson, she tried to appear at her best. Her son Leon was away from home, and was at present well up in his stepfather's favor, and Wayne was a fine-looking young man with a large fortune in his own right,

needing not a penny of his father's money; why should she not patronize him? She did so to the best of her abilities, talking often of him to his father, telling how Wayne had improved, had ceased to be a boy, and lost all of his "sullen" ways, and was really delightful in conversation. The sore-hearted father heard it all in silence, and grew more and more disappointed. If he had been told that Wayne was silent and miserable, it would have comforted him a little, for then he could have told himself that the boy was troubled about something, and was trying to put a brave face on it; as it was, he could only feel that his son had nursed his boyish jealousies until he had become utterly estranged from his own father. And the folly of this chafed him so that he grew colder and haughtier every hour.

Wayne made his visit at home very brief, and came back to Aunt Crete more thoroughly embittered against his stepmother and stepbrother than before. His version of it was that they had succeeded beyond their fondest hopes; they had robbed him of his father.

In this way the summer passed. Wayne by no means gave all his time to Enid, but perfected his plans for the autumn with such success that October found him well established in one of the most time-honored institutions of learning that this new land boasts. Here

he set himself to work with such energy and perseverance that the college honors which he had determined regretfully to forego when he resolved upon choosing a new college for his senior year, began to pour upon him. Passing all the rules of precedent, he was unanimously chosen as the representative of the class at commencement; and in various other ways did he distinguish himself as the hero of the day. Aunt Crete beamed upon him from the choicest seat that the great opera house afforded, and believed him to be the greatest man in the world. His father had received a formal invitation to be present, and had formally answered that a court engagement of importance would deprive him of the privilege.

There was a girl toiling away in a little Western town who would have given her year's earnings for the privilege. She hinted something of the kind to Wayne, and he promptly made her realize the utter impossibility of such a proceeding. Sarah Thompson was given to understand that young ladies of culture did not take long journeys for the sake of visiting young men. Oh, he did not put it in so bald a manner, but Sarah was quick at receiving hints, and had blushed painfully, to the very roots of her black hair, over the suggestion that his reply contained. Yet beside Aunt

Crete sat Enid Wilmer, fair and sweet, and happy in the honors heaped upon her friend. She had made almost as long a journey as Sarah would have had to take, for the pleasure of hearing that one oration; but then, Enid Wilmer had an aunt to visit — that must be taken into consideration.

Within a week after his graduation Wayne Pierson went abroad. He had not meant to go so soon. His plan had been to go home for a month's visit, and he had told himself determinately that he would get acquainted with his father over again, and insist upon breaking down that wall of cold reserve. He also told himself, with less determination, that he must go to Hardin, he supposed. He sighed heavily whenever he thought of this, and forebore to make any definite plans about the going, and put the thought of it from him as much as possible. It was enough that, being a man of honor, he meant to go, of course, sometime.

In point of fact he did none of the things thus planned. A rare opportunity for going abroad with choice company and exceptional advantages for sight-seeing being offered, this young man of impulse decided in a single night that he would avail himself of it.

By October, again, he was established in Berlin for a graduate course, and was writing to Aunt

Crete frequently, to his father every three or four or six weeks, and to Sarah, with the regularity of the sun, once a month! He had planned this with care; had explained to that patient young woman that his studies were very heavy, as indeed they were, and that he had extremely little time to spend in correspondence; a letter a month was all he could conscientiously give to her. He nursed his conscience very carefully in those days, to make sure that it should sustain him in all that he did. He had need to later, as temptation spread itself out alluringly before him. It chanced that Mrs. Wilmer was advised to go abroad again, and this time she took Enid with her. As she gained in strength, she naturally desired to give Enid all the benefit of travel that she could, and in course of time their route led them to the very town and street where Wayne was boarding. Not without plans to that effect. The correspondence begun so long ago between Enid and Wayne had never been entirely dropped. Wayne wrote only occasionally, his conscience keeping him well up on the remembrance that he had not time for letter-writing; and Enid, whether by accident or design, never replied to his letters any more promptly than he had to hers, yet they kept in touch with each other in this way; and their relations were of such a frank

and friendly character that before Mr. Wilmer started for home, after establishing his wife and daughter comfortably for a six weeks' stay, he called upon Wayne, and told him that any little oversight he was able, without too much trouble, to keep on the ladies, would be duly appreciated. After that, what could Wayne do but call frequently and send cards of invitation or admission, as they came in his way, and act as escort to points of interest? In short, he kept an "oversight." Who could have done less? Let it not, for a moment, be imagined that Wayne Pierson was, in any sense of the word, doing what is called "flirting" with Enid Wilmer. His regard for her was too painfully sincere to have tempted him in that direction. His attentions to her, during that winter abroad, were such as any gentleman might have offered, could hardly have helped offering, indeed, under the circumstances; but they helped to add painful weight to the chains in which he had entangled himself.

It was not very much better after Enid went home. In some respects it was worse. With her and her mother alone in a foreign land, it was easy to assure himself that he must, at whatever cost to his future peace, do for them whatever would add to their comfort; but it was difficult for that much-burdened conscience

of his to find excuses for the letters that still occasionally went to her after she was fairly settled again among her home friends. There was another who was more or less troubled by these same letters, and that was Mrs. Wilmer. Her daughter seemed to be entirely undisturbed, and, up to a certain point at least, entirely frank. She carried the letters promptly to her mother as soon as they were read, and they were still such as might have been read aloud anywhere, and would have interested. Wayne knew how to write fascinating letters from abroad,—though in the Thompson home it might not have been suspected,—but Mrs. Wilmer, mother-like, was troubled. Since this young man cared to continue writing to her daughter, until the years were past in which they could both be looked upon as children, and since she cared enough for his letters to reply, and chose not to do as much for other young men who would have been glad to correspond with her, why did not they both — Yet here she had to stop. Up to a certain point, as has been said, Enid was frank and communicative. She was gently dignified whenever the mother sought to understand the peculiar friendship that seemed to exist between herself and Wayne Pierson.

XVIII.

Conscience Salve.

MEANTIME in her far-away Western home, the girl, Sarah, received her letters, and answered them, and lived her life. Those two items are put first because, in a sense, they were her life. Had the monthly mail failed her it is not known what Sarah Thompson would have done; but it did not fail, and, having put as absolute trust in the writer of those letters as she did in the daily sunrise, she was not unhappy. She had argued the question out with her heart, and accepted, once for all, the fact that Wayne Pierson was not like other men, was far too high above them to be judged by their rules. Her letters, that at first had been so unlike her dream of what such a correspondence would be as to almost make her heartsick, had gradually grown to be models. After a little she even ceased to mourn over the utter absence of all terms of endearment. Somewhere in her reading she came across the story of the famous college president whose words were so weighty that students hung upon them,

and great men repeated them for authority. "What did the president say about last night's address?"—so the story ran. "Why, he said it was perfectly magnificent!"

The questioner wheeled in his chair and looked his astonishment at the speaker before he asked:—

"Did President Blank say that?"

"No," said the other, with a shamefaced laugh; "but he said its equivalent, from him—he said it was 'good.'"

This story Sarah Thompson hugged to her heart; she felt that it explained Wayne to her. His "Dear friend" at the beginning, and "Always your friend" at the close, grew to mean far more to her than the "darlings" and "sweethearts" that came to her girl friends. Ruby Knowles, for instance, was engaged to Sam Scott, the young man whom Sarah had once imagined she admired,—she wondered over it now as something too strange to understand,—and his letters during the six weeks that he was away from home were spread out for Sarah's admiration. They began, "My dearest girl," and were plentifully besprinkled with pet words, and phrases from "sweetheart," and "lovey" down. It was an evidence of Sarah's development in several ways, that she was able to assure herself that she would rather have "Always your friend."

As the months moved on and it became necessary for her to absorb herself in something, Sarah Thompson chose the school in which she was still a teacher. To it she gave thought and time and prayer, and it gradually became apparent even to the dullest that she was making of the "upper deestrict" what it never could have become but for her, a model school. The newly fledged young teachers, who winter after winter found their way to it, early learned that they must try, at least, to reach up to the standard of the assistant, if they desired to hold the position. It became, in course of time, not an easy thing to do. Sarah Thompson had "ideas." As she read and studied, they grew; she fell into the habit of explaining them as well as she could in those long foreign-bound letters, and, curiously enough, Wayne Pierson grew interested in them, and grew intensely interested in the school, his school, as he began to have a kind of pride in calling it. Sarah's ideas, some of them very original, afforded him foundation for many a day-dream, that being a habit in which he still luxuriated. He saw himself and Enid Wilmer established and recognized as patrons of the upper district, with Sarah Thompson for the leading teacher. They would assist her to make it a model indeed, and to make of herself a model teacher. When it occurred to him one day that here was

a possible solution of his own difficulties,— Sarah to become absorbed in her school, to fall in love with it indeed, to such an extent as to make all other interests secondary and easily shifted, — he hugged the thought to his heart and spent almost as much time as Sarah did in planning for the school. He entered into her ideas and explained them to her, and enlarged upon them until they became plans of which she had never dreamed. Gradually he began to send her appliances with which to carry out these ideas. Boxes and rolls and mysterious looking packages began to come to her by mail, by express, by freight, some of them ordered from New York or Chicago, some of them actually crossing the sea to her and bearing that fascinating foreign mark or label.

In due course of time it came to pass that the upper district was the pride of the township. Then they began to come from Westover to see the new-fashioned maps and globes and charts, and — what not? that that indefatigable young teacher had introduced. They gazed and questioned and wondered and admired, and the heart of Squire Willard swelled within him in pride, and he talked far and near about the "upper district" and the strides it was taking; and the Westover *Chronicle* bristled with headlines once more, reporting its

onward march, and making plain enough, for those who wanted to understand, the real source of the wealth that had fallen upon Hardin township. For the people in Westover, as well as the residents of Hardin, knew, every one of them, that Sarah Thompson's "beau away out in foreign parts kept sending things to her all the time."

In truth, Wayne's gifts were royal. If he had been trying to bury a troubled conscience under a wealth of modern educational appliances, he could not have heaped more lavish gifts upon the proud young teacher. When he sent a magnificent system of moving worlds, sun and stars and earth for Sarah to explain to the children of the upper district the mysteries of day and night and summer and winter, the delight of the people knew no bounds. The thing must have cost many hundreds of dollars. Why, it could *go!* All the district not only, but the country around, nay, all Westover, in course of time, came to see the wonder and to hear the happy Sarah's explanation of it; for she could explain it, at least to their entire satisfaction. Wayne had written twelve pages telling her just how to do it. The Westover *Chronicle* fairly exhausted its resources of exclamatory type to do justice to the exhibition, and the proud young teacher sent in the next day's foreign mail a marked copy of the

effort; and cut out another copy of it to wear close to her heart, for was not one dear name repeated by those types at least a dozen times? Happy Sarah! Poor, foolish Sarah!

She was developing in other ways besides that of a teacher and demonstrator of new methods. As a girl in the district school she had been fond of study; in her loneliness she renewed her love for it. She had lonely hours in these days, or would have had if she had given herself time for them. The young people of her world grew uninteresting, and by degrees "silly"; she did not enjoy their society, nor their amusements, and, little by little, unintentionally at first, she drew farther and farther away from them, until, being friends with all the township, she was really intimate with no one. They grew to admiring Sarah, being proud of her, boasting of her among themselves, and letting her alone. The first time they seemed actually to forget to invite her to a hallowe'en frolic, she cried a little. She had not been to any of the neighborhood gatherings for months, she had been so busy; but to be forgotten! —

Well, she must be busier. She plunged into study as never before. Always being fond of books, she lived in them now; made them the companions of every waking hour. She made rapid, even amazing, progress in French, when

one considers that she had no teacher. But directly that sentence is written one realizes that it is not fair; she had an excellent teacher. Wayne Pierson had learned some time before this that he need not attempt to arrange a series of puzzles for Sarah's leisure hours by writing partly in French; evidently she mastered the letters readily enough. Her first timid effort to reply to them in the same language nearly took his breath away. It was the first time he fully realized what strides the girl was making in the language. But it pleased him. He made it into a soothing salve for his conscience and spread it thickly. What an avenue of culture he had opened to the girl! but for him she would not even have known how to translate stray French phrases, such as one finds in ordinary reading. He added yet another chapter to his beautiful day-dream; Sarah should become a magnificent French scholar; she should go to France some day, why not? and perfect herself in pronunciation, and become celebrated as a teacher; and he and Enid would talk together of her wonderful success, and congratulate each other that it was their work. Let it be well understood that he always took himself severely to task after one of these dreams, and assured himself that he was pledged in honor to one with whom Enid Wilmer could not, in the

nature of things, have anything in common. But he used his powerful influence to increase Sarah's fondness for the French language, and filled pages with explanatory notes on obscure French rules, and by degrees discarded the English altogether and wrote everything in French. But he still wrote his semi-occasional letters to Enid, keeping in touch with her life; asking questions in so shrewd a way as to keep himself informed of her friendships and interests, and letting his heart rejoice over her frankness that revealed her indifference to all mankind. "Why should you want her to remain indifferent?" his troublesome conscience asked him occasionally, and he sternly bade it be still.

Once a wild hope sprang up in his heart. Sarah had much to say in her letters that winter about her associate in the school. He was better educated, she wrote, than the others had been; he reminded her a little, just a *little* bit, of him, in some things, though in others they couldn't be more unlike. Wayne grew deeply interested in the young man; admired him, suggested ways in which Sarah could be helpful to him, and by every method that he could conceive labored to increase the girl's interest. Evidently it deepened. Mr. Bateman had been showing her how to press flowers, and had offered to get her some rare specimens not

to be found in that part of the country. Then, Mr. Bateman was so glad to discover that she could read French; he did not read it very well, and was working on a subject that made it necessary for him to read certain French books; she had promised to read aloud to him. Wayne blessed the day that he began to give Sarah French lessons, and waited in suspense and hope. Then came total silence; two letters, and Mr. Bateman's name not mentioned. He questioned so closely that Sarah, blushing with shame while she wrote, confessed that Mr. Bateman had misunderstood her helping him, and — she must have been to blame, father said she was; he said people ought to know what they were about in this world, and not just by carelessness lead others into trouble; and she was careless, she supposed, she had never thought of such a thing; she was so sure that everybody knew that she belonged to him, that — Sarah had grown reticent even on paper, but she must be true — Mr. Bateman had asked her to become his wife, and she had told him with surprise and pain that she was almost the same as a married woman, and she thought he understood because folks gossiped so much, she didn't think he could help it. And Wayne had groaned in spirit and put the hope of Mr. Bateman forever away from him. She was "almost the same as a

married woman!" Then was he almost the same as a married man?

In all these ways the months and then the years slipped away, and Wayne Pierson still lingered abroad. He had taken his degree, and spent an entire year in travel, and it came to pass that he was rapidly nearing his twenty-fifth birthday and had not yet definitely settled just when he should sail for home. That he was to sail soon he settled with his conscience, but he told it angrily that that ought to satisfy it. Wasn't he to be trusted? There were reasons, now that the years of study that he had set for himself had been successfully passed and the year of travel that he had hoped for had been indulged, why he felt in haste to go home; and there were reasons why he felt as though he could never go. How was he to face that "upper deestrict"? It was no easier now, nay, it was harder, than it would have been at the first. Sarah might have improved, he had no doubt but that she had, she might have become an angel, it would make no difference to him; he had known all these years just what he wanted, and but for that hateful story told him at that hateful wedding long ago he might have secured what he wanted. Be it observed that Wayne Pierson was still at work blaming rumor, circumstance, fate, for all his experiences. No, he reminded himself

occasionally that if he had not been a fool and rushed away, taking for truth what was a false and malicious story furbished up to ruin him, and tumbled headlong into the meshes woven for him out of ignorance and misunderstanding, all might have been well. But in the main he blamed that relentless Fate which had pursued him ever since his father's second marriage, and the name of the Fate was always Leon Hamilton. He had bitter reason for this, it is true. The determination to trace the rumor concerning Enid's engagement had become almost morbid with him, and bit by bit through the years he had ferreted out and pieced together the story, until he knew to a certainty that Leon Hamilton had with patience and painstaking worthy of a better cause planned to have the rumor, with enough details accompanying it to make it plausible, float through just the right channels to reach his ears. By what underhand methods he had discovered that such news would be as gall and wormwood to Wayne, that young man had never been able to learn; he was obliged to content himself with the muttered statement that Leon Hamilton seemed always to have been in league with the evil one, and could doubtless discover by his aid what had never been committed to mortals.

There had been times, of course, when this

sorely beset young man had considered whether he could not take the honest way and frankly explain to Sarah the situation. If he had only done so at the first! If during those first few weeks after leaving the school he had written to her and been honest throughout, had told her of the mood in which he had returned from the wedding, and the mistake that her father had revealed to him, and his mistaken idea that as a man of honor he must abide by it, and his discovery of the falseness of the rumor he had heard while away, and the certainty that it revealed to him that his heart was not his to give; it might have been done.

Sarah was true; he had not drawn her on, and she knew it; she would have accepted the situation, with pain perhaps, but with true womanly dignity, and in a little while she would have forgiven and forgotten him. But he had not been honest, he had been persistently false; and as the years passed he had steadily fostered and cemented the falseness until now she looked upon herself as "almost a married woman"; and her father — but as often as Wayne thought of the honest blacksmith he found it difficult to suppress a groan. He could seem to hear his voice, and it was saying, "Sho! a man that can't keep his promises can't help himself nor nobody else." No in his sane moments, Wayne Pierson

assured himself that it was too late; it might have been done if — that terrible "if"!

He might well have groaned at thought of the honest blacksmith. He was honest to his heart's core, and wanted to believe in other people, and was troubled and anxious.

"Sho!" he said to the long-suffering Mrs. Thompson, when the foreign mail came in, and Sarah had rushed away with her letter. "Sho! how many years is he goin' on that way? Teachin' of her! Who wants him to? He didn't ask her to be his scholar for a lifetime; he asked her to marry him. Anyhow that's what honest folks thought he meant, but he ain't ever said a word to me, not a solitary word; and it's goin' on five years and he a-courtin' her all the while — and the queerest courtin' that ever I see in my life, or heard tell of! I don't like it, I tell you now; and as sure as my name is Isaiah Thompson, if he don't —"

And then Mother Thompson would take him in hand and remind him of the steadiness of the foreign mail, and of the lavish gifts for the school that came all the time, and why should a young man spend his money on the "upper deestrict" if he didn't do it for Sarah's sake? Of course it was all right, and Sarah, she wasn't troubled. Only yesterday, when she was talking about some nonsense that the

school children were having over, she said, "Mother, when folks can make me believe that the sun isn't going to shine on this earth any more, why then, maybe, they can make me believe that Wayne Pierson isn't to be trusted; but until then it isn't worth while to try."

The poor father toned down his grumbling into inarticulate mutters, but he was sore-hearted and afraid. He knew the world better than his daughter did. It was an added anxiety to him that he could not talk with her freely about it all. His Sarah Jane had changed. She was just as loving as ever, and she was, for the most part, as cheery as a girl could be, and nobody could be more thoughtful of her old father and his comfort, but — For one thing he could not joke with her any more; and he could not seem to so much as mention the young teacher to her. He couldn't tell what it was, but something about her stopped him as sure as he attempted it. The utmost he could do was to wish that he had "never set eyes on the fellow"; and this at times he did heartily.

XIX.

"Who is Sarah Jane?"

IN the way that he had done all important things in life thus far, that is, following out a sudden impulse, Wayne Pierson at last went home to Aunt Crete in time to celebrate his twenty-fifth birthday. Up to twenty-four hours before he sailed, he had not been sure whether he should start in another week, or in two weeks, or in a month. The accident of a friend having engaged passage and being unable to go, finally determined him. He could accommodate his friend by going, and he must go sometime, why not now?

It is difficult to explain why a young man so exceptionally brilliant as Wayne Pierson certainly was, and with such excellent mental training as he had undoubtedly enjoyed, should order all his movements by the law of impulse, except on the basis that the one foolish mistake of his life had taken such hold upon him that it held his common sense in chains, and left him to be the creature of the

moment. It is painfully true that he shrank from decisions of all kinds, because deliberate calculation seemed to bring him nearer to that crisis in his life that he felt must come.

To Aunt Crete's eyes he was vastly improved. In truth, he kept his best for Aunt Crete. In her presence he was again the genial boy, entering into a frolic with all his heart, yet with a background of manly dignity that he could assume on occasion in an instant of time. His aunt studied him carefully, and there were very few particulars in which she would have had him different.

In one respect he still puzzled and pained her. As a young boy Wayne Pierson had been his aunt's model of youthful piety. His faith in God as his Father and Jesus Christ as his Saviour seemed to have been born with him, and to be strong and abiding. Aunt Crete, listening to his youthful expositions of all things theological, had been wont to say to herself: "Here is another exhibition of what a child can become who is consecrated to God from his birth. Wayne will never know the time when he became a Christian. I presume Samuel did not."

Alas for the promise of his youth! What had become of that assured faith and that precocious wisdom to which all things obscure to others were made plain? Just when and how

did Wayne get so hopelessly drawn away from the narrow path as to have lost sight of it entirely? Aunt Crete did not know. She puzzled and wept and prayed over it. She tried all the devices known to a loving heart to win her boy to be frank with her on the subject, and failed. Up to a certain point his conduct was satisfactory enough. He went to church with her regularly on Sundays, and gave respectful attention to all the services, bowing his head during prayer with every outward appearance of reverence. He even refrained from criticising the sermon on the way home, out of regard for Aunt Crete. But the fond dream she had had that her boy Wayne, when he came again, would take his place at the head of her modest household and conduct family worship morning and evening, and take part in the mid-week prayer-meeting, and, in short, be in this, as in all things, a model to young men — this was Aunt Crete's disappointment. She tried to argue with him a little. Why were things as they were?

"You led prayers in your school, you told me," she said tentatively.

He smiled gravely when he thought of it; that experience seemed to have been a hundred years ago. What would Aunt Crete think of the roll of those majestic prayers that he used to read!

"That was when I was a child," he told her, with his fascinating smile; "now I have 'put away childish things.'" Then, gravely: "No, Aunt Crete, it is too bad to disappoint you in anything, but I am no hypocrite. I am not a praying man, and I will not repeat words of prayer when my heart does not mean them. I am as far from being what you consider a Christian as a man can well be, I imagine."

"But why, Wayne, why is it? Your grandfather, whom you grow more like in manner every day of your life, was as stanch a Christian as the country about here has ever known, and your dear mother had as strong a faith as any woman that ever lived; it is wonderful and dreadful to me that you have not followed her in this. I am sure that you will, sometime; I cannot but be certain that her believing prayer for you will be answered, but I cannot bear to think that you will wait to be driven home! Plenty of people do take the wilderness road, I know; but I thought you chose the narrow one in your babyhood, and would have sunshine all the way."

Then Wayne's face would darken, and he would say coldly: "I have had none too much sunshine in my life, I can assure you, Aunt Crete; if it is your idea that God scourges and drives people in order to win

them, that way has certainly been tried with me; but it has failed, as I should think it would with everybody."

He thought, this wise young man, that because his mother had gone early home to heaven, and his father had chosen to marry again, and his stepbrother had not been to his mind, that he was a terribly ill-used, forsaken man. Hidden away in his heart, not fully owned by himself, was this obstacle in the way of his giving God his service. He ought to have had a happy life. He had meant to be good, and true, and honorable. He had been sad but not rebellious, he told himself, even when his mother went away. He had determined to be brave and bright, and to be all things to his father. He had done his best, and with what result? His father had turned away from him and married a stranger and brought her home to his mother's room! Even that he might have borne in time, he had meant to try; but there had been brought also another boy, who had been allowed to steal his place, his possessions, his home, even his father, and had gone on through the years unrebuked so that now he had no father and no home. If this was the loving-kindness of God, why then — He was too well trained to complete the sentence even in thought, but he let the subject rankle as

much as it would. Aunt Crete, after trying by all means in her power to win him, owned to herself that she must let it alone and give herself to prayer, and wait for God to find the road by which this child of many prayers would be willing to travel home to his mother.

There was another person, if Aunt Crete had but known it, who was making, and had been making through the years, every effort in her power to win Wayne Pierson for Christ. There had been times when Sarah's letters would be full of the subject; when her eager, prayerful longing for him would crop out every few lines, despite her efforts to write about something else. Knowing as little about the real life of a Christian as the young man did, he admitted to himself that Sarah was evidently growing in that direction also. There had been wonderful doings in the old red schoolhouse, no longer ago than last winter. One after another of his pupils, those for whom he had been anxious, and those about whose futures he was most sceptical, had settled what Sarah declared was the all-important question, and begun to live for Christ. Among them was Beet Armitage, the incorrigible. He had taken his heart full of hatred and revenge to the Lord, and lo! it had become a heart of love. Sarah was almost eloquent over that description. If he could have seen Beet Armi-

tage one night, after a meeting, cross the room and take Joey by the hand, and say so that all could hear, "My brother, I have not been a brother to you, but I mean to deserve the name after this. I ask you to forgive everything I have ever done to trouble you, and let me begin over again with Christ in my heart."

Wayne Pierson had read the story with a curling lip, and had told himself if he had heard it he should have wanted to knock Beet Armitage down! *He* to ask forgiveness! If that miserable Joey had done it, why — And then, as if to satisfy him, that was the very next news! The half-brother, Joey, had become a follower of Jesus Christ, and the two brothers led the boys' prayer-meeting together but the night before! And then Wayne, though his lip still curled, had no word that he cared to speak; and he met Sarah's earnest appeal, then and afterward, only by marked and continued silence.

Well, he lingered through the sunny weeks at Aunt Crete's, letting the summer slip away from him, and coming to no decisions in any line. There was somewhere back in his inner consciousness the determination to devote himself to teaching. Certain of his professors knew this, and twice during the summer came flattering openings to him to commence his life-work as instructor in leading colleges. He con-

sidered them, and put them from him. The answer he gave on paper was that there were reasons why he could not positively decide as yet, and he must not keep them waiting. What he told his heart was, that once settled at work, the anxieties of Isaiah Thompson with regard to his daughter's future could no longer be ignored. As long as he remained indefinite as to where he should live and what he should do, nothing could be expected of him. It was all very well for the poor fellow to assure his aunt that he was no hypocrite; he said nothing of the kind to himself. Instead, he told himself with growing emphasis as the days passed that he was a hypocrite of the most despicable sort, and found a shade of comfort occasionally in calling himself hard names. One experience of the early summer that had opened his eyes more fully than before to his position ought to be recorded here.

On the steamer, during his homeward voyage, he fell in with a college friend who had married and settled in one of the charming suburban towns near New York. Thither Wayne allowed himself to be taken for a few days' visit, before going to his aunt's. Behold, but a square away from his friend's beautiful home, was settled another college friend, and his wife was an intimate friend of Enid Wilmer, and Enid was that very week making her a long-promised

visit. Wayne hugged to his heart the fact that all this had been entirely unknown to him, and if he had believed in Providence as he once did, would have called it a providential arrangement. As it was, he felt, without inquiring into the logic of the reasoning, that the accident in some way entitled him to have as pleasant a week with Enid as he could. Of course, under the circumstances, there was abundant opportunity. He needed not to lift his hand, or express a thought. Walks and drives and sails and tennis games arranged themselves, always with giving Enid to him as a companion. Since the other friends were mated for life, what was more natural and reasonable than this arrangement?

They went one evening to Table Rock to get a wonderful view of the sunset. Enid was a girl who was singularly susceptible to the solemnly grand in nature, and, as is the case with true natures, the scene had hushed all desire for conversation. She had stood apart, rapt and silent, gazing upon the crimson and gold of the distant sky, and seeming to see veritable angels moving in and out of the massy bars of golden light, that had resolved themselves into turrets and towers, as though they belonged to the palaces of the city of God. All the others of the party had moved on down the hill; their voices could be heard

in the near distance beginning to chatter again; and still Enid, unconscious of it all, stood, and gazed and gazed. And Wayne, a step behind her, stood with folded arms, and waited and gazed, not at the glory in the sky, but at the fair girl who was being held by it. Suddenly some movement of a twig, or the rustle of a bird winging by, arrested her; she turned, and discovered that they were quite alone.

"Why!" she said, "where are the others? Have they gone?"

She never knew how it happened; and certainly Wayne did not. There must have been a misstep, and she must have been nearer the edge of the overhanging rock than she thought. For an instant she wavered and would have fallen, then she clutched at the jagged rock with one hand,—and then Wayne had her in his arms, and was carrying her quite to the beaten path. And what his white and trembling lips were saying was, "Oh, my *darling!* are you hurt?"

It had been a single moment of peril. It seemed that a miracle must have been wrought to save her from the fall; the ravine was many feet below, and the way down was lined with cruel, sharp-edged rocks. The deathly pallor of Wayne's face was certainly natural enough under the circumstances; but Enid's face, for a moment pale, flushed until, in its fair beauty,

it seemed like a reflection of the glory of the sunset. She had struggled instantly to free herself, and then were heard voices nearing them.

"Why, Enid dear, aren't you coming? We did not notice that you were left behind."

"I am here," said Enid; and she ran and clasped the hand of the pretty matron whose guest she was, and walked with her back to the village, while Wayne and the deserted husband paced slowly on behind.

Given a sensitive, naturally an honorable, nature, such as Wayne Pierson possessed, and can the night that followed be imagined? For one single, perilous second he had spoken truth. TRUTH! let him not deny it to his soul, at least. Had she heard? Oh, she must have heard! What was to become of him? In either case, even if she had not heard, what was to become of him? How was this terrible thing to end? He did not think; not a rational thought passed through his excited brain that night; he just tossed and exclaimed mentally, and saw himself at the bottom of a very real precipice, with no way out.

What he did, next day, was what he told himself that, being an honorable man, he must do. He went not near Enid Wilmer all day long. There had been no engagement that necessitated their meeting, it had simply been a

tacit understanding between the young couples whose guests they were that they were to spend much time together, of course. And this day, being Wayne's last, various plans that had been until then overlooked came up for discussion. Wayne negatived them all, so far as he was concerned; he had some writing that must be done in the morning, and in the afternoon he must go to New York and look up a neglected friend. Despite fascinating schemes and some coaxing, he rigidly adhered to his programme, and left for home by the next morning's train without other good-by for Enid than the carefully worded message that he left with his hostess for her.

And the girl? Well, she had heard. Girls always hear. It was not the fright or even the sudden rescue that brought that lovely glow to her fair face. It was the sound of words that, let Wayne Pierson say what he might about being a man of honor, her heart told her she had a right to expect from the young man who had so carefully and steadily been her friend through all these years. That day of desertion was a surprise and a pain to her, but when a woman trusts she *trusts*. By night she had quieted all her heart-throbs, a touch of rising indignation with the rest, and constructed a theory. For some reason, and since he was what he was, undoubtedly it was a good rea-

son, he was not prepared to speak the thought of his heart. Perhaps he had made a solemn promise to his dead mother that he would not engage himself until he was a certain age, or until a certain thing had happened. Perhaps he had pledged himself to accomplish some definite work before he spoke words that would commit him to any woman. Perhaps — oh, perhaps any one of a dozen theories, what mattered which it was? He was good and he was true and he was grand in every way, and she was his "darling"! Sometime, and it must be that it would be very soon, else he who had been so careful of his words would not have been thrown off his guard even by her peril, — very soon, probably, he would tell her the whole sweet story, and then she would understand. Until then, couldn't she trust? Yes, indeed! she could trust him forever.

It was under such conditions that Wayne came home to Aunt Crete and managed to so conduct himself outwardly as to make her think that he was the same dear heart-free boy; and he spent, all things considered, by far the most miserable summer of his life. The only salve to his conscience was found in maintaining utter silence toward Enid. She had written the last letter, and their correspondence had never been sufficiently regular to make delays embarrassing. Wayne by no

means told himself that his correspondence with her was at an end; he simply said that he would wait until he decided what to write, and would not allow himself to ask just what that sentence meant. Enid and her parents had gone West to visit some far away uncles and cousins, and to see The Garden of the Gods and Central City and other places of note. They expected to be constantly changing their address; indeed, Enid had frankly told him that one drawback to her summer would be the irregularity and uncertainty of their mail. When he wondered what she would think of his long delay, this comforted him.

Moreover, he grew irregular even with those monthly letters that had heretofore been so punctual. Someway, to write to Sarah from New England seemed very unlike writing to her from Berlin or Paris. He was frightfully near to her! He must go to her! The exclamations hint at the consternation with which both thoughts filled him. It is not probable that he would have lingered quite so long had not his aunt fallen ill. She was at no time seriously ill, but he told himself with excellent reason that she would miss him doubly while she was ill. So he stayed, and gave his days to petting her in the most charming ways that love and ingenuity could devise, and his nights, too many of them, to miserable thoughts.

Then, suddenly, came one of those bomb-shells that seemed to be needed to quicken him into action. This time it was a telegram, more imperative in its message than even telegrams are given to being.

"Sarah Jane is very sick; you must come at once. ISAIAH THOMPSON."

Aunt Crete was dressed in her new wrapper that morning, and sat in her arm-chair by the window. She had the open telegram in her hand when Wayne came back from a trip to town whither he had gone to execute her commissions.

"I opened it," she said; "I thought it was from your father, and might need immediate answer. Who is 'Sarah Jane'?"

XX.

The Demands of Decency.

HOW he got his trunk packed and the hundred last things attended to, and evaded Aunt Crete's bewildered curiosity, and got himself at last on board the night express, he could not have told then, nor afterward. In some respects, it was a more bewildering journey than that first one he had taken over the same route.

It affords a curious illustration of the young man's state of mind to note how promptly and unquestioningly he obeyed the summons.

This was what bewildered Aunt Crete.

"It is a queer message," she grumbled; "I should have thought that at least he would have said, 'Can you come?' If you were going to marry the girl her father couldn't have done more than that. It is a good deal to ask, I must say, of just a teacher! But then, I suppose they are frightened about her, and want to humor every notion she has. How old is she? Just a little girl, I suppose?"

Wayne was giving attention to a refractory lock, and with color heightened, no doubt by the struggle he was having with it, allowed his aunt to "suppose" what she would, and turned her attention as quickly as possible to something else.

He will remember forever the curious mixture of pain and disgust with which he finally swung himself from the train at the Hardin station. His reflections during the journey had certainly been very different from those of five years before, but they were not less gloomy and miserable. He dreaded the ordeal through which he was now to pass more than he had any other in his life. He had not believed in Sarah's illness. She was not well, of course; but it was evident to him that the sturdy blacksmith had taken advantage of what was, no doubt, a slight illness, to summon him peremptorily to his duty. Very well, he had come, and his mind was at last settled; if only he had settled it years ago! He should tell Sarah the whole miserable truth, and throw himself on her mercy. He had not much doubt of Sarah, he believed in her goodness and in her sturdy purity of heart; but the father! — Well, if they held him, why, he was held. He should not run away. He was a man of honor. But not of such honor as the blacksmith demanded. It was a bitter portion

for this proud soul that he must that day sink himself forever in the estimation of the blacksmith. There was another depth of misery at which he would not let himself look. Suppose that Sarah's influence should prevail and he could go from there, free. As a man of honor must he not tell Enid the whole story? And what would Enid say?

Then the train whistled once more, and he was at the station. They were there by the half-dozen to meet him; his old pupils, grown to manhood and womanhood now. He resented this. Such coarse publicity! How could decent people endure to make themselves a town talk in this way? He passed them with cold nods, but they seemed not surprised. They held back with strange embarrassment. "How do you do, Professor?" they said, the men lifting their hats respectfully and looking after him gravely. One pressed nearer. He had to look a second time to be sure that it was Beet Armitage. The years had changed him, certainly. Beet was studying music in the nearest large city, and was going to make a success with his voice. Wayne had known that, but he had not realized that Beet had become outwardly a gentleman. He held out his hand, but had no word to speak. Wayne wondered, and tried to be friendly.

"Well, Armitage," he said, "here we are again; but you have changed so much that I hardly knew you."

"I have a carriage waiting for you, Professor," was all the reply he received. The carriage door was thrown open, and Wayne motioned into it, then Armitage closed the door, and he was whirled away alone. This was a relief. But Hardin must have changed in many ways. Who would have supposed that they would consider the ceremony of a carriage necessary? Nobody had seen fit to ask him where he was going. The whole state knew, it seemed, that he belonged to the blacksmith's family! He sneered at the thought and chafed under it, and was in his most cynical and at the same time bewildered mood when the carriage drew up at last before Isaiah Thompson's door. He half expected to meet Sarah in the hall; her invalidism he told himself would probably be equal to that. A crowd of curious boys and some little girls were gathered not far from the door; this angered him the more. "We ought to have arranged for a public meeting in the town hall," he told himself, as he seized his valise from the hand of the officious driver. Even he knew him. "Never mind that, Professor," he had said, respectfully: "I'll see to it."

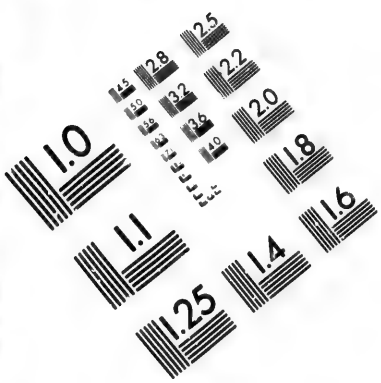
Then the door opened, not waiting for his

knock, and there appeared, not Sarah, not the burly blacksmith, but Enid Wilmer.

"She is living yet, Mr. Pierson; but you must come at once." Her voice was as calm as the summer morning, and yet as cold as if it came from lips of ice. She turned at once without giving him so much as a hand-clasp and ran upstairs. Wayne followed her in a bewilderment that was torture — followed her to his old room. There, kneeling beside the bed, was Isaiah Thompson, and there, with her face close to the pillow, was the gray head of Mother Thompson, and lying white and beautiful among the pillows was Sarah. Never in all his tortured imaginings of the scene when he should go to her had she looked in the least like this. There was radiant beauty on her face and in her eyes, but it was unearthly beauty. She turned her eyes as the door swung open, and the radiance deepened. "Oh, Wayne!" she said distinctly, and with a mighty effort tried to raise her head, and it fell back; and the mother gave a great cry, and those who had been watching for the end knew that it had come. Sarah was gone away where she could trouble him no more.

An hour afterward the stricken father came to the room that had been assigned to Wayne, and told in broken sentences, interrupted by great waves of grief, what he could tell of the





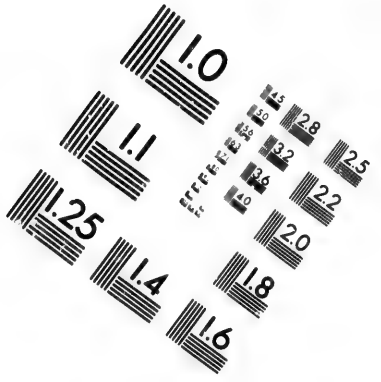
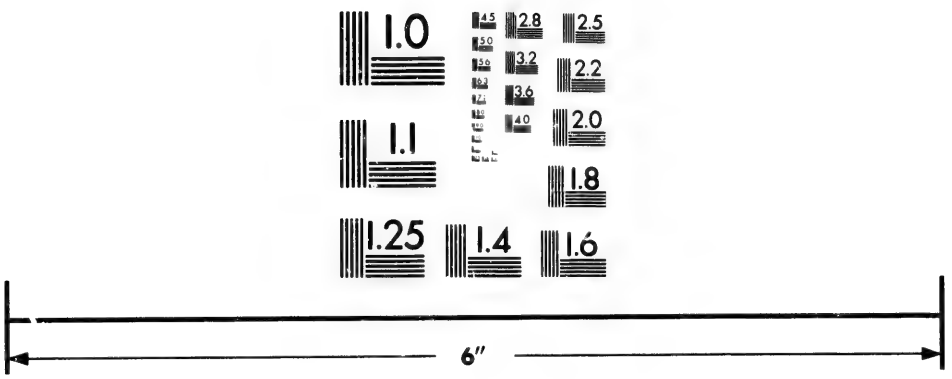
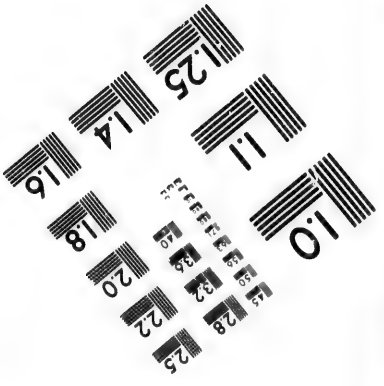


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story. He had wrung Wayne's hand in a grasp so mighty that the pain of it still lingered. In that supreme moment of sorrow all the forebodings of evil that the father had felt were laid to rest. Wayne had responded promptly to his summons; the first train by which they could by any possibility hope for his coming had brought him, and he had looked like one stricken to the earth. He had loved her, then, and been honest with her all the time, and had meant the best for her; and the endless delays that had seemed so unreasonable had been necessary. Sarah had been right in that as in all things; he was true. The father's heart went out to him in utter surrender from that hour. He went to him as soon as he could.

"You see, it was all so sudden," he said, trying to apologize for the fierceness of the blow. "Oh, she has been sick off and on for three weeks or more, but not a mite of danger, the doctor said, just run down. Yes, she was run down and had good reason for being. You know that place we used to call the hollow? Well, there's been sickness there all summer; there mostly is, a shiftless set as ever lived. Sho! to think my girl should have to be sacrificed for such as them! that's what it is, Professor, sacrificed. She would go there and set up nights with the sick children, and

bathe 'em and fuss with 'em days, and do things that their mothers didn't know enough to do; and it was too much for her. First thing we knew she had the fever; nothing dangerous about it, the doctor said, kept saying it all the time; jest slow and aggravating like, on account of its slowness; and you see we was sort of expecting you every day, and Sarah Jane she wouldn't have you scared by any word that she was sick, and so it run on till all of a sudden she took this turn for the worse, and for twenty-four hours she was jest waiting to set her eyes on you once more afore she went to heaven. I thank my God that she had that, anyhow." Here the story broke, and the father laid his great head on the little table near which he sat, and shook the chair and the table with his mighty sobs. And the miserable young man, looking indeed like one stricken, kept his station by the mantel against which he leaned, and knew no word to speak.

"That girl named her well," began Mr. Thompson again, when he had recovered self-control. "She said she was 'an angel of light' to the folks in the hollow, and so she was. Everybody will tell you that; sho! it ain't the hollow folks only; she was a blessing and a comfort to everybody she come near. That girl loves her like a sister, and she ain't been acquainted with her but a few weeks. You

know who I mean? The girl with a queer name, she said she was acquainted with you; the last name is Wilmer."

"Enid," said Wayne, mechanically. It seemed to him that it was the little plaster of Paris image of Samuel on the corner of the mantel who spoke, not he.

"Yes," said the blacksmith, "Enid; curious name, I can't remember it, but Sarah Jane took to it and to her; they took to each other; I never see the like. She come here about six weeks ago, she and her mother. They was going to stay somewhere in some quiet place while the father went on to look after some mines, and they jest happened here, come to see that Indian mound you know eight or ten miles north of here. Well, the girl took a notion to stay. They wanted her to go to the mountains and to the lakes, and I dunno where they didn't want her, but she had jest made up her mind to stay here, and stay she did. And she took a notion from the first minute to Sarah Jane. She see your picture, that one you had took for the scholars, you know; Sarah Jane got it copied, she missed hers, somehow, and the girl — what did you say her name was? yes, Enid, saw that, and knew it in a minute; and they got to talking about you, I s'pose, her and Sarah Jane, and it made her feel kind of friendly to Sarah Jane

to find that she belonged, as you may say, to one that she was so well acquainted with, and they jest took to each other. She has been a great comfort, I'll say that for her. My girl has clung to her most amazing right through the sickness; and she wasn't a mite afraid, and wouldn't go away when they began to talk about her getting the fever. Nothin' catchin' about the fever, the doctor said; nothin' at all; it was jest a low state of the system that made her take it; them are his very words. And to think I believed his story to the last, that she would get up and be stronger than ever. Oh my! oh my!" Another great wave of pain, and Wayne's misery so deepened by all he had heard, that it seemed to him the only way of relief would be to lie down still and cold in the parlor below, where they had placed Sarah.

He lived through the terrible days that followed. From sheer inability to talk to any one he kept his room carefully. They brought him food, and respected his grief. Enid he knew was much in the house, she and her mother, acting as though they were sisters bereaved, instead of as strangers. He heard her soft step on the stairs, and her low voice speaking tender words to the broken-hearted mother who clung to her even as her child had done. But she spoke no word to him; she passed him swiftly and silently with a far-away,

respectful bow when they chanced to meet in the hall, or on the stairs. He felt as far removed from her as if he himself had sunken into that ravine from which he had rescued her, and she had gone up into the waiting glory. It was young Armitage who came to him from time to time, low-voiced, thoughtful, himself heavily stricken, to inquire as to whether this or that arrangement would suit him. Mr. Thompson had said that everything was to be just as he, the professor, wanted it. Wayne groaned in spirit over the words, and took up his burden. He must be chief mourner, then! Decency, it seemed, demanded it; nay, more than that, regard for the memory of the dead and the sorrow of the stricken living demanded it. He must not say those words to Isaiah Thompson that he had come a thousand miles intending to say. He was free, it is true, but only death had freed him. No, he was not free; he was bound by all the laws that govern propriety and decency to pose before the world as the intended husband of the girl they would meet to honor. It was an awful mockery, but it was a solemn one. He had played the hypocrite for five years, and he must go through to the bitter end. He gave his pocket-book, well filled, to Armitage and told him to come for more when that was gone, and to do everything that

money could do to honor the memory of the dead, and not to let him hear one word of the details. And when Beet Armitage went away with soft tread and a face of speechless pain, the poor young man left behind groaned aloud in his misery as there flashed before him the thought that that other one was stricken indeed! He remembered that there was not many months' difference between their ages, his and Sarah's, and that they had been much together, and he translated rightly the look on the young man's face. If they could but change places, he and Armitage! How freely would he pour out his money and how faithfully would he give his time to making the last tokens of love and respect all that they could be, if Armitage, the honestly bereaved, might take his place as chief mourner!

That evening there came up with his tea-tray a letter. He devoured the handwriting with his eyes, and left his tea untasted to read the contents. Enid's writing!

It began without formula of any sort: —

"I was to tell you things that it seems not well to keep from you longer. Her love, her 'dear love and trust,' were to be given to you. She wanted you, for some reason, to know especially that she had never suffered one hour of pain through distrusting you. She had been

sure that the long separation was necessary, and was pain to you as to her. If you came in time she would tell you herself how blessed her life had been by your love, but if you did not, I was to deliver the message. I cannot do it justice; you who know the strong, true heart of the girl whose love you won, can imagine it. There was another message more earnest, if possible, a pleading cry from her very soul. She wants to wait for you in Heaven, and to be SURE that you will come. I place the word in capitals to express if I can the intensity of her plea. I feel that I am but a poor channel through which to pour the love and hope of that brave, true heart; if you had been with her and heard her for yourself, you could never have forgotten the scene as long as you live. I feel that I have learned something of what it is to love with an utter abandon of self and all selfish aims. I count it a privilege to have had opportunity to be with and minister to the closing hours of such a woman. I will not intrude sympathy upon you.

"ENID."

If the poor young man who struggled alone with his pain and his remorse had needed anything to complete his humiliation, this was the added touch. What must Enid think of him

now? And he could not explain, could not make her understand how it all was, and that he had meant from the first nothing but honor and true nobility. In the name of decency he must keep silent now.

His brief instructions concerning the funeral were carried out well. Young Armitage had been out in the world of late; he knew what custom considered necessary in order to show proper respect for the poor clay that the soul leaves behind. He saw to it that everything was as it should be; and the town helped him well. All Hardin not only, but the people of the surrounding towns for miles away, and many from Westover besides, came to the funeral. The people told for years afterward what a peculiarly solemn time it was, and what a long array of carriages followed poor Sarah to the grave.

Armitage had ventured upon one question more. Would the professor ride in the carriage with Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, or— Wayne interrupted him with such a short, sharp "No!" that he turned away at once, believing that he understood. Westover sent its finest carriage for his use, and in accordance with the custom of the region it followed close behind the hearse, with Wayne sitting alone, chief mourner.

"Of course," the blacksmith said, when

Armitage began an explanation, "that is as it should be; it is his right."

It shall be admitted also that the father's sore heart found a crumb of consolation in it; Sarah had her rights at last. The one for whom she had lived in all sweetness and trust for long years, was as close to her now as could be arranged. All the world, his world, saw and understood. No, none of them understood the weight of misery filling that first carriage. To appreciate it, let it be remembered that from the first Wayne Pierson had meant to be true, at any cost to himself, to his idea of honor. That it was a mistaken idea may perhaps be admitted without argument, but such as it was, he had tried to abide by it. Alone in that carriage following that fair clay, being followed by a father and mother who had lost all they had, he felt the veriest hypocrite that the world contained. At times it was almost as much as he could do to hold himself from opening the carriage door and shouting out to the decorous crowd that it was all a mistake, a cruel mistake, and had been from the first. Of course he did nothing of the kind. He sat with folded arms, and let the carriage wind its slow way in and out among the graves. He alighted at the proper time and stood with bowed head, while the simple service was conducted

at the open grave. The crowd watched him curiously, and pushed a little in order to get a better view, and whispered to one another that "the professor looked like death!"

In one of the carriages not far behind the immediate family rode Enid and her mother. "It was the poor girl's wish, mamma," Enid explained to the bewildered mother; "'you will go with me to the very end, won't you?' she said, and I promised."

As they turned away from the grave, Wayne caught a glimpse of her pale, pure face; she was not looking at him, nor at the grave. The day was westering, and she had turned her eyes toward the glory of the coming sunset. Her face reminded him of the hour at Table Rock, that time when for once during all these weary, hateful years his heart had spoken, and he had said, "Oh, my darling!" It seemed an added hatefulness and hypocrisy to think of it now, and he turned away, angry with himself and with all the world.

"I didn't think the professor would be so cut up," said Squire Willard, as they talked it all over that evening. "He has stayed away so long that somehow —" a pause, then a long-drawn sigh — "but it's a genuine thing, sure enough. I saw his face when he turned away from the grave, and it looked as though he had buried all the hopes he had in life."

XXI.

Whither?

ONCE again Wayne Pierson took the midnight train from Hardin, and this time it was Enid instead of Sarah who watched him disappear down the one long street of the village. It might have been a small bit of comfort to his troubled soul had he known that she stood in the moonlight at the window of her room and listened to his last footfall while bitter tears rained from her eyes. And yet it is doubtful if he would have been consoled, either, had he known the cause of her deepest sorrow. It was not that she had lost him, and that another had apparently won the first place in his heart, but that one whom she had trusted and honored had fallen from the pedestal of integrity upon which he had stood, in her eyes. He had bidden her good-by earlier in the evening; a lingering hand-clasp on his part, and he had tried to look into her eyes to see if he read contempt there, but they were cast down and would not meet his own. Then he had gone out and indulged his

old propensity for tramping about, that he might be alone and not obliged to talk.

All the old liking and admiration for the professor showed itself on the part of Sarah's father and mother as they bade him good-by, heaping blessing on his head, even though they were unaware that the envelope he slipped into the mother's hand held a liberal check which he begged them to accept as an expression of his gratitude for all their kindness.

So that leaf of his life was turned over, and he walked away free from chains that had bound him. What next? And whither should he turn his footsteps? He shrank from every place he had ever been in before. He could not return to Aunt Crete, her questionings would be torture. After reflection he decided to go for a time to one of the large Western cities and study the vast tract of country known as the West. He was too unfamiliar with that region, and this would occupy his thoughts.

No sooner was he established in the prosperous city, a gateway to western wilds, than there arrived at the hotel he had chosen for headquarters a party who furnished an unexpected opportunity for carrying out a part of his scheme.

As he entered the dining room one morning, whom should he meet in the hall but his old college friend, Macfarlan, for whom he felt sin-

cere regard. Warm greetings were exchanged, and the two young men took seats together at the table. There was much to be talked over as each gave to the other experiences of the years that had passed since leaving college; in part at least, of course, there were sealed records which neither young man revealed to the other, not at the first meeting if ever.

It was while the two were driving about viewing the city that Macfarlan suddenly exclaimed: —

"Pierson, do you know you are the man of all others that I am delighted to see just now? I expect to go to the wildest West in a few days. I've joined an exploring party sent out by the government to explore the Yellowstone region, that vast wilderness lying just on the borders of civilization, and I want you to go along. I have a vivid recollection that you are a worshipper at Nature's shrine. Think of over three thousand square miles of Nature unspoiled by man. I know that will be an inducement to you."

A question or two from his listener encouraged Macfarlan, and he went on eagerly to dilate upon the advantages of such a trip.

"You know the expedition that went out last year brought back famous reports. It must be magnificent, according to all accounts. There is every variety of scenery, and wonders

without end: mountains, plains, forests, rivers, lakes, geysers, cañons, and even volcanoes. Of course the game is splendid, and the opportunity for adventure unlimited. Come! go with us, won't you? It will be like a glimpse of the primeval world to get up there where —

'Nature's heart beats strong amid the hills.'"

Macfarlan was surprised that his friend did not hesitate and interpose objections and say he would think about it, before committing himself to a decision, and he regarded Wayne with a keen look when that young man declared, with ill-concealed bitterness, that he was more than willing to go anywhere away from the world. After having urged him with enthusiasm to go, he nevertheless felt called upon to warn him that the journey was a perilous one, and the hardships great. His friends, too. What of them? Wayne smiled at that. Who in the wide earth cared about his comings and goings except the dear aunt up in Berkshire? As for being free, he was free as any vagabond in the universe. He caught at the proposition to join the expedition with eagerness. The deeper he could bury himself, the better it suited him. Moreover, it was in the line of his own plans, and an opportunity that might come but once in a lifetime.

He was soon suitably equipped, and the party set out in high spirits. The long journey by rail was monotonous, and all rejoiced when, leaving railroads and civilization behind them, they mounted horses and galloped away in the freshness of an early summer morning. Even Wayne caught the infection of buoyant spirits in the exhilarating atmosphere and sense of freedom as they skimmed over the plains. The novel experience, the keen enjoyment of Nature's wonders, and the gay companionship, left him little room for gloomy meditations. He felt like one who had cast his past behind him and entered upon a new stage of existence. He wished it might last forever, this swift ride among the fragrant pines. It was typical of life, this pathway through the wilderness. But yesterday it lay over breezy uplands and sunny slopes. Stretching away in the distance was a clear, flower-bordered path, blue skies, transporting views on every side, and the gleam of bright wings with a grand chorus of wild, sweet airs. And it was yet like life when mists turned blue skies to gray, and the path lay over mountain passes, or in the lowlands where uprooted trees barred the way through the storm-swept valley.

It was one night when Wayne's turn had come to keep watch of the fires which they had built for protection against wild beasts, that his

troubles came down upon him like a nightmare. Usually two shared the night watch, but Wayne had declined the offer of companionship, saying he had writing to do and would be unsociable.

While the others stretched themselves in profound sleep, the one silent watcher sat gazing into the fire, recalling the events of the past few weeks; especially every word and look of Enid's when last they had met, the memory of which he had heretofore steadily put from him. But now haunting thoughts trooped into his mind and took possession. Oh, those days of torture! the end of a labyrinth of mistakes, resulting in being misinterpreted and misunderstood and probably scorned by her. And he with no opportunity to speak a word in his own defence! He could see again the cold disapproval in her true eyes when she had met him at Mr. Thompson's door. Suddenly a resolute look came into his face, and he told himself that he did not intend to rest quietly under her censure without an attempt to vindicate his honor. It was bad enough, but he was not the contemptible creature she evidently believed him to be. He would write out the whole plain truth and send it to her as soon as possible. He would begin at once.

In a capacious pocket of his coat were writing materials enough to last a considerable time; he had thought to make full notes of

the topography of the country, as well as jot down the incidents of the journey. But the writing that rapidly filled the pages of a tablet was of intenser interest than anything of that sort could be.

"To vindicate myself as far as possible, I must go back a few years in my history," he wrote in his letter to Enid.

Then there followed an account of the cause and manner of his leaving home, his teaching, the story of his relations with Sarah Thompson, and the wretched mistake which the immature judgment of his young manhood had allowed to go uncorrected, believing that such was the only noble course, and how it had culminated in misery through the unhappy years.

"I may never see you again," he wrote; "but whether I do or not, I want you to know that I have been guilty of no greater sins in this connection than the carelessness of youth, and what I now see to have been an error of judgment. Since the morning we stood together in the woods and said good-by I have cherished in my heart the image of the girl who then gave me a white rose. It has been my precious treasure through wanderings on sea and land, because it was to me a type of herself. Never has there been a throb of my heart or even a straying of fancy for any other woman. Never did I knowingly, in thought,

word, or deed, give Sarah Thompson reason to suppose that I had more than friendly interest in her until I fancied that circumstances compelled me to engage myself to her. The words I spoke to you at Table Rock, which forced themselves from my lips when I was off my guard, were my heart's deepest secret and the truth which I longed to tell you months ago, but could not honorably because of what you now know. You may imagine my deep distress at being obliged to go through what I did at Sarah's funeral, posing as chief mourner, and feeling like the veriest hypocrite that ever breathed. I had already decided, before the summons came, to tell Sarah the truth, for I could not longer lend myself to deceit. I am glad she was spared that pain now, and you can understand why I did not disturb her father and mother by any such revelation, and why I was obliged to act the hypocrite to the bitter end. My punishment for egotism, in not seeking advice from older and wiser ones, for violating the strongest principle of my manhood, and allowing myself to appear to be true in relations to which my whole soul revolted, has been at times almost greater than I could bear, especially the thought that your confidence in me is shattered. So, my friend, even if you cannot give me what I dare not ask, I pray you let me at least have kindly

judgment from the one being who is dearer to me than the whole world besides, and believe me that I hate, abhor, every false way."

He had not felt so great a sense of relief in a long time as when he folded those sheets, placed them in an envelope, sealed and addressed it. Now, even if he never came safely through the wilderness, his comrades would send the letter, and Enid would know the whole truth, that he had meant to be all that was right and honorable, and learn that he had loved her and her alone; and then he wondered again for the hundredth time whether that rosy glow that overspread her face at Table Rock was the mere reflection of the sun, or what he hoped it might have been.

But then he grew hot and uncomfortable when he reflected upon what she must have thought of him afterward. No man could be accounted honorable who had spoken words like those to a girl and then silently retreated.

It was after the expedition had reached the heart of the forest that they came one day upon a piled-up mass of trees uprooted by the storm, which made a wall high and wide across their path. To add to the difficulty the undergrowth on either side was extremely dense. Every member of the party at once became sure that he could find a way through or around the barrier. There was a fascination

about exploring for one's self hard to be resisted by the more venturesome, and each plunged into the forest in different directions, with the understanding that whoever found egress was to signal to the others. It was after a long, weary struggle that the party found themselves upon the trail again. Their satisfaction turned to dismay, however, when they discovered that one of their number was missing.

"Where is Pierson?" one shouted to another, excitedly. Then the woods echoed to his name, and anxious glances passed between the men when no response came to their signals.

"How could he have got out of hearing so soon?" asked one.

And another replied:—

"You forget it is many hours since first we came upon the blockade. He probably made a dash into the woods and became separated from us at the very first."

"He is an impulsive fellow," said one.

"And a brave, daring spirit as ever breathed," Macfarlan answered, with a frown.

They drew near each other and consulted, finally deciding to put no greater distance than was necessary between themselves and the comrade from whom they were separated, and so would go into camp as soon as they reached

an available spot. And then, gradually, after the manner of men, most of them settled down into the comfortable conviction that it would be all right, Pierson would surely turn up in the morning. Nevertheless, they instructed the watchman to give the signals at intervals through the night.

And the one lone horseman who, by the light of the moon, pushed his way through tangled undergrowth, what of him? He had fancied when the way became blocked that, by circling about somewhat, he could reach a clear space visible in the distance which must be the trail, but he would experiment somewhat before mentioning it to the others. His faithful horse had almost human sense and would work his way through difficult places where many another animal would have reared and plunged and refused to go. On he went, expecting each moment to shout to the others to follow him. Unfortunately, the rest of the party, before discovering his disappearance, had decided to move in an exactly opposite direction, consequently every advance of each placed them still further apart.

And Wayne, by many unavoidable turnings, at last became confused and lost all sense of the direction of the trail. When shouts and signals brought no response from the others, he was not so greatly dismayed as might have been sup-

posed; separations had occurred before, and they always got together afterward, so he rode on confident that he had found the right path, believing that his companions would soon reach it by another route. Even when darkness closed about him it caused no alarm. He selected a spot for his bedroom, picketed his horse, built a fire, wrapped his blanket about him, and lay down to sleep, with the feeling that supper might add to his comfort, and that he should have a keen appetite for the camp breakfast next morning.

He was far too weary to feel either loneliness or fear, and slept soundly, rising once or twice to replenish the fire. At early dawn he was still on his way again. It was still dark in the woods, but there was no time to be lost; certainly he was on a trail that led somewhere, although the pine needles continually falling sometimes covered all trace of it. It was after weary hours of travel, and breakfast still an unknown quantity, that Wayne dismounted to cheer his discouraged horse by a rub down and a rest. "Good fellow," he said, with one arm about his neck after the old fashion of caressing Liph senior, "you and I are lost. Did you know it?" The faithful creature elevated his pointed ears, gave a cheerful whinny, and rubbed his nose on his master's hand as if to say, "Cheer up, I'll stand by you."

Alas! his promises were, like some human creature's, soon broken. Wayne left him to browse about unhitched, as had always been his custom, while he walked a few rods away to an opening in the woods from which he could see several vistas. He stood trying to decide which one probably led in the direction of the lake, where he thought the party might be encamped. It was but a moment or two when he heard a scramble, and, turning, saw one of the smaller wild animals of the forest darting away in one direction, and, horror of horrors, Liph in another! He shouted to the horse, but fear had taken possession of him. With frantic leaps and bounds that cleared all obstacles, he fled like the wind, and vanished in the distance. It was useless to try to pursue him, and yet his master did, tearing as recklessly through what barred his way as the horse himself, and calling his name long after he knew it was in vain, keeping up his weary pursuit until he was convinced of its utter hopelessness. Liph was gone! and with him blankets, guns, revolvers, fishing tackle, matches — everything gone except the clothes he wore, his watch, field-glass, knife, note-book, and pencils.

XXII.

"*A Land not Inhabited.*"

OF course much time had been lost in the pursuit of the horse, and though at first it seemed to Wayne an impossible task for him to pursue his journey on foot, nevertheless he pushed manfully on, knowing that his only hope was to reach the camp where they were probably awaiting him. Refusing to yield to despair, he wrote notices of the direction he had taken and posted them on trees in an open space. Fully convinced that he was on the right trail, he felt that sooner or later the party would come up with him.

Through all that day he had cast aside dismal forebodings and cheered himself with the hope that before many hours he would be laughing and talking over his adventure with his companions. It was not until the shadows of night again closed around him, and he attempted to build a fire, that he realized and admitted to himself the extreme peril of his situation. Alone in an unexplored wilderness,

no food, no fire, nor means to provide any, surrounded by wild beasts, and famishing with hunger. What could he do? Nothing. Absolutely nothing; at least, not that night. Faint from hunger and weary beyond expression, he sank down among the branches of a thick growth of stunted pines. He looked up to find the sky, but all was inky darkness. The wind sighed dolefully through the trees, the woods seemed alive with the screeching of night-birds and the dismal howl of the wolf. These sounds had had no terrors when resting by a blazing campfire surrounded by companions, but now they were fearful.

Despite the awfulness of it all he slept at intervals through the long, hideous night. At the first glimmer of day he crept out, stiff and sore, to pursue his dreary journey, hope again springing up to delude him into the belief that he should momentarily descry the smoke of the camp or hear a signal. Hour after hour passed, and he travelled on in what seemed a limitless, never ending treadmill. When another night drew its shadows about him he sank down in despair. He was lost! He must resign himself to die there, far from any human soul, to die of starvation or be torn to pieces by wild beasts, with no fire to hinder their approach. His safety could be accounted for thus far only by the belief that angels encamped about him

during those terrible nights and defended him while he slept.

In the morning, while the sense of weakness from hunger and thirst was great, he yet girded himself anew to meet the new day. He remembered a statement of a certain philosopher, which was that Providence had implanted in every man a principle of self-preservation equal to any emergency which did not destroy his reason. The thought put new vigor into him. Why should he perish like an animal? He would not. Force of will would sustain him, allay hunger, and bring him out victorious. And again began the measured tramp of the lonely traveller through the vast forest, crackling twigs, and the matins of million birds alone breaking the solemn stillness. As often as he sank from exhaustion after scrambling over logs and through thickets, he would rouse himself with the reminder that his rescue depended upon himself.

As he groped and stumbled over fallen trees, or crouched by night beneath branches to protect him from cold winds, he had bitter thoughts of that God who is said to rule and govern all things. How could he be expected to think of God as a Father? It was strange fatherly care that had allowed his whole life to be embittered by a chain of cruel circumstances and now left him alone in the wilderness to perish

from starvation or to be torn to pieces by wild beasts. Yet foolish people prated of His protecting care. He had always believed that there was a powerful, wonderful Being who created the universe; but as for His controlling it and caring for his creatures — that was a delusion.

But here he came to a difficulty. Surely, his mother's God was a Father, for she had commended her child to Him with her last breath, praying that he might be shielded from all evil; and she had loved her Father in heaven as she loved nothing earthly.

Probably a few choice spirits knew how to secure His favor for themselves, but certainly it did not extend to their children. His mother's dying prayer had not been answered. How could he for one moment think that God loved him when he had been denied the happiness that belongs to youth, and had been fairly pursued with evil; a bitter, life-long enemy raised up in his own home, and his father alienated from him. His years of young manhood, too, had been shadowed by another cloud — his conscience made a loud protest just here, declaring that this later trial was of his own making, but he was too irritated to heed it. It was a miserable ending of a most miserable life, he told himself. A few days more, and he should perish.

Famished, thirsty, footsore, he dragged his weary limbs unflinchingly on, till he emerged from the forest into an open space and beheld, lying at the foot of the hills, a broad, beautiful lake glittering in the sunshine. The supply of drinking water in his flask, which he had treasured like gold dust, was gone, and his thirst had become almost intolerable. The sight of that wealth of water put new life into him. Never in all his life had the sense of taste been satisfied as in that long drink of cold water of crystal clearness. Revived, he resolutely refused to think of his swift-coming fate, while he gave his whole soul to the worship of Nature here in her very temple. It was an enchanting scene, — a silver lake of broad expanse and lovely curves was fringed on one side by the dark forest. A mountain range reflected itself in the water, stretching away peak on peak as far as the eye could reach, and, curling about them, softening the rugged outlines, was the ascending vapor from numberless hot springs. The brilliant jet of a magnificent geyser added unearthly beauty to the scene, while the bluest of skies overarched all.

"Nature, with folded hands, seemed there
Kneeling at her evening prayer."

These lines came into Wayne's mind as the sweet, entrancing beauty of the scene stole upon

his senses. It was a triumph of spirit over flesh that this famished, jaded being could stand even a few brief moments in adoring reverence, hunger and weariness forgotten in joy of beholding this marvellous beauty. He was soon irritated at himself though that, despite all the grandeur about him, it began to be as nothing compared with the sound of a friendly human voice or a crust of bread.

Wayne Pierson had sometimes fancied that he set little store by life, but during the last few days the words, "All that a man hath will he give for his life," had come true in his experience.

While he yet gazed over the broad expanse of the lake he spied something that set his pulses throbbing wildly. Surely, in the distance he could see a canoe, and in it an oarsman, and, O joy! it was rapidly approaching the shore where he stood. He paced the beach in excitement, while visions of food and friends and safety filled his mind. Nearer and nearer it came, and now he discovered that it was not a canoe at all, but a cruel delusion. To his bitter disappointment a huge pelican presently stalked from the water, flapped its dragon-like wings, and flew to the top of a tall pine in the distance. It was then that Wayne Pierson's courage failed, and he cast himself upon the sand, face downward, in despairing agony,

as the horrors of the situation closed about him.

The day was drawing to a close, and he must search for the safest place to spend the night. As the last rays of the sun fell upon lake and mountain and shore, he had no heart to drink in the beauty of the scene, although it did not escape him. His attention was attracted though, in the golden light that brought out everything distinctly, to a small plant of bright green. He went over to one and pulled it up by the root. It was long and tapering, not unlike a radish. Class, Syngenesia: of the genus Carduus, the scholar promptly decided; in plain English, one of the thistle family. He tasted it. It was palatable; the first thing he had found that could be called food in all those four days of fasting. He ate it eagerly, joyfully, involuntarily contrasting the state of the man who, during most of his life, had scarcely given a thought to daily bread, with this poor wretch who counted a thistle root a heaven-sent blessing. It seemed to be nutritious and there was abundance of it growing about, and now it was certain he should not die of starvation as long as it could be found. With hunger and thirst appeased, there came a wonderful revulsion of feeling. He grew almost cheerful, and set about selecting a place for the night, finding it in a sheltered spot between two trees which stood

so near together that the low-growing, interwoven branches made quite a luxurious couch. If only he had his blanket which was fastened to the horse. Poor Liph, where was he, and how fared it with him? Wayne did not give himself up to slumber at once that night. The spot was even more entrancing with the light of a full moon glorifying it; opportunities like this must not be wasted in sleep. He seated himself on a bluff that overlooked the wondrous panorama, and gazed in delight. The quiet scene soothed and calmed him. The lovely lake, with shimmering waters and setting of mountain and forest, reminded him of scenes among the hills of Palestine, and of a hymn he had often sung; he softly hummed the air, and then the magnificent voice, that choirs and concerts counted it a privilege to obtain, lifted itself up in song, mountains and forest reëchoing the words of the simple strains.

"Calm on the listening ear of night,
Come heaven's melodious strains,
Where wild Judea stretches far
Her silver-mantled plains.
Celestial choirs from courts above
Shed sacred glories there,
And angels with their sparkling lyres
Make music on the air.

"The answering hills of Palestine
Send back the glad reply,

And greet from all their holy heights
The dayspring from on high.
O'er the blue depths of Galilee
There comes a holier calm ;
And Sharon waves in solemn praise
Her silent groves of palm."

It was not alone the voice of Nature speaking to the desolate man in the solemn beauty of the night. The spirit of God had followed him even to "the uttermost parts of the earth." A strange awe came upon him and a consciousness that God was a real, living Being. He had read scores of times that "all things were made by Him," but that night, in the midst of beauty so unearthly, it was written in the skies and on the earth. "The hand that made us is divine." And then the words of a chant came to him with an irresistible desire to sing them. The sublime grandeur of the spot fitted the stately measures better than frescoed ceilings and carved pillars. Never had he sung them in the choir-loft while worshippers hung upon the words as now in the silence, the mountain walls sending back the echoes. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty."

He went through the beautiful chant to the end, decorously, as if in sound of an audience,

and there came to him for a brief moment the sense of a majestic Presence. It seemed, in the sacred stillness of that hour, that there were but two beings in the universe, God and himself, and that he was being searched by penetrative eyes. Never before had he experienced so great a sense of condemnation and self-abasement. There came into his heart, for the first time in his life, a longing for reconciliation with this strong and mighty One. Had he come out to this wilderness to find Him? He remembered Aunt Crete's remark, years ago, that some people had to go through life like the children of Israel, by way of the wilderness, because they could be subdued in no other way. Dear Aunt Crete! What would she say if she knew he was on the way to-night through a veritable wilderness?

These feelings had for the time driven away the haunting thoughts of the horrors of his situation. He threw himself down to rest among the branches, with face upturned to the sky, and fell asleep with this hush upon his spirit. How long he slept he knew not. A fearful sound awakened him. He knew at once that the loud, shrill scream, like that of a human being in distress, came from a mountain lion. There was no mistaking that dreadful voice, for he had heard it often in the

distance and been deceived by it. Now it was so near as to cause every nerve to thrill with terror. Involuntarily he answered the yell by another, intending to frighten the beast in turn, then seizing a branch of the tree sprang lightly into it and hurriedly scrambled from limb to limb as near the top as safety would allow. The savage beast was growling below, snuffing the boughs which had formed Wayne's bed but a moment before. He answered every growl of the lion with one almost as terrible, which seemed to infuriate it still more. Terrified beyond measure, Wayne increased his voice to its utmost volume, while he frantically broke branches from the tree and hurled them at the howling creature.

Apparently it was in vain. It could not be frightened away. To Wayne's horror the lion began to make the circuit of the tree as if to select a spot for springing into it. Then the victim shook the tree until every limb rustled with the motion, but still the fearful beast pursued its catlike tread, circling about the tree, lashing the ground with its tail, and howling furiously. The thick branches cast shadows so that neither foe could see the other, but when Wayne heard the howls on one side of the tree, he made lightning-like leaps to the other side, while cold chills crept over him at thought of being torn to pieces by the monster. Expecting

each instant that the fearful leap would be made, he tried to prepare himself for the conflict which he felt must soon come. Suddenly it occurred to him that he would try silence. Accordingly he clasped the trunk of the tree with both arms and kept perfectly still.

Meantime the lion raged, and howled, and tramped its circle round, filling the forest with echoes of its fearful howls. Suddenly it imitated the example of its victim and became silent also. Terrible minutes passed. The silence of the beast was even more fearful than to hear it crashing through the brushwood, as now Wayne did not know from what direction to expect it. After a silence that seemed like hours, the creature gave a spring through the thicket and ran screaming away into the forest. Wayne, almost fainting from exhaustion, climbed down from the tree, strange to say into his former bed, and instantly dropped into a deep sleep, from which he did not awaken until the sun was high the next day. He shuddered when he recalled the experience of the night before, and was tempted in the first waking moments to believe it to have been only a hideous dream, but his torn clothing and broken branches lying about the tree testified to a horrible reality.

He refused to go over the dreadful thing in imagination, and hastened to the shore of the

lake to feast his eyes again upon beauty such as he had never looked upon before in any land. The morning sunshine had brought out from their hiding places the dwellers in this favored spot. The place teemed with life. Mocking-birds trilled out gay songs, and flocks of swans sported on the quiet lake. Mink and beaver swam about unscared, and soft-skinned otters performed funny aquatic gymnastics. Deer, elk, and mountain sheep had not fled at the explorer's approach, but gazed upon him with wide, innocent eyes, and he told himself with grim humor that they probably considered him one of their unknown kinsmen.

The hope that he should find his party encamped on the shore of this lovely lake was crushed when he surveyed it with his glass and saw no signs, and especially when there came no answering signal to the shrill whistle that he blew.

XXIII.

"*I will fear no Evil.*"

THE next few hours brought a marked change in the atmosphere, the thermometer having fallen with surprising rapidity. A storm of mingled snow and rain, common to those high latitudes, had set in, and Wayne, whose clothing was not suited to the cold weather, with benumbed fingers gathered the few thistle roots that grew about there, then hastened to prepare a place of shelter from the storm. There was a friendly spruce near with low-growing, wide-spreading limbs. About these he heaped other branches laid thickly together to keep out the winds. When done it was a sort of wigwam with boughs piled in one corner for a bed. Into this refuge he crept, first filling his flask with water.

The delay occasioned by the storm would make the prospect of rejoining his companions more doubtful than ever. It began to be plain to him that if ever he escaped from that wilderness, it must be by his own unaided efforts.

"I will fear no Evil."

For two days the east wind roared, the storm raged, and the prisoner in his house of spruce did the only thing left to be done, he thought. He went back, as far as memory reached, to the brightness of his early childhood. He lived over again the Sabbaths with his mother, and then was reminded to count the days since his separation from the party, and discovered that that day was the Sabbath. To pass the time away, he began to repeat aloud psalms and chapters that he had learned to recite to his mother. He lingered on one verse in the Twenty-third Psalm, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death thou art with me." The valley of the shadow of death! That was where he was on that Sabbath.

"I will fear no evil." It must be comforting, he mused, to have a faith like that. If he could but feel that the Lord was near now comforting him, it would relieve the desolation; but he could not conceive of himself as ever attaining to such a state. His mother had faith, and Enid had it. And then his thoughts drifted off to Enid. He could see her in church now as he had often watched her, with earnest face upturned to the preacher, and clear eyes reflecting the truth she drank in. Would she care if she knew of the terrible ordeal through which he was passing? A long time he spent

recalling the scenes of the last summer, bringing to sound and sight all her lovely words and ways. Again he heard her singing a gay carol or the tender strains of a hymn sweet and low. What a rare face was hers, with lovely eyes sincere and sweet! It was a face that one would not meet twice in a lifetime, not even among old world pictures and statues; and the reason was apparent: it was not mere charm of shape or color, but the lovely character shone from her eyes sincere and sweet, and told of one who scorned deceits and affectations, who lived not for her own pleasure, whose tongue dropped words of kindness, whose hands were helping hands. Had he lost her forever, this white-souled girl? he resolutely put away further thoughts of her. It was insupportable that she had probably learned by this time to think of him as one beneath her notice. He must set his mind upon something absorbing or he should lose his reason. It is doubtful if this would not have happened could he have read a letter Enid received about that time.

Leon Hamilton, after several years abroad, had returned to his native land. To all appearances he had outgrown youthful follies, and was pronounced handsome, cultured, genial, charming, by a large circle of friends. He soon visited Enid's home to renew his acquaintance with his mother's old friends. His man-

ner and conversation were calculated to deceive the very elect. Thoughtful, earnest, courteous, with lofty sentiments on all moral questions, Mrs. Wilmer was delighted with him, and even Enid could but feel that he was greatly changed. In anticipation of this visit he had studied up certain questions from a Christian's point of view that he might be furnished with a sort of passport to Enid's favor. Thus he had the language of Canaan at his tongue's end. And yet Enid's intuitions distrusted him, for which she blamed herself. To atone for this and to please her mother she consented to correspond with him occasionally on account of old friendship's sake. A paragraph in a letter received from him ran thus: —

"I presume that you have heard that Wayne Pierson has fled from the world into the wilderness, joining an exploring expedition in the far West. And it was none too soon. I am sorry to say he was having trouble on account of a love affair. It seems that he has broken the heart of a country damsel, literally, for she has lately died. Her father and mother, naturally, are much stirred up over it and have vowed vengeance upon him.

"I had hoped that as he grew older he would have learned wisdom. Perhaps you are aware that love-making is an old weakness of his. He got into serious trouble several times from

that cause while in college; seemed to have no scruples about engaging himself to two or three girls at one time. One would never suspect him of it, either. He really has a talent for deception. While his manner is most impressively courteous to all womankind, he yet assumes something like indifference toward them, which diverts suspicion from him. I very much regret that any person, even slightly connected with me, should have been guilty of so great a crime as winning the affections of a young, ignorant girl, merely for his own amusement."

The thought that the day was Sunday and that Enid was probably in church sent Wayne back again to the Bible. So would he be nearer to her with thoughts in harmony. What would he not give for a Bible now? However, he had read it through twice, and when a child had committed much of it to memory. There were whole chapters and psalms that he should never forget, and scattered passages without number. He did not know then, and not until long afterward did it dawn upon him that the wise mother had not been haphazard in her selections; they really embodied a system of theology: sin, repentance, and peace with God. He set himself now the task of recalling everything he knew about it: the life in Eden, the sad ending of it; the sins and wanderings of

God's chosen people, their restoration; the birth of the Redeemer and justification by faith. He knew it all intellectually — this cultured young man, for he prized the Bible as being rich in literary lore; but the mystery of redemption was to him a mystery still. A fool may solve it if he will, and a wise man may know it under the same conditions, but either has power to draw bolts and bars so that the spirit will not enter.

He did not hurry through the repetition of these as a schoolboy might; he stopped to analyze and reflect, and finally he began to feel amazed that anybody should have the temerity to stand out against God. It was really absurd for a poor, weak man to lift his head in defiance of a Being so strong and glorious. He did not feel self-condemned in this. He had always reverenced God. But after all, cold reverence was unsatisfying. True loyalty meant more than this. Had he during all these years been a rebel? Had he been trying to bring unacceptable sacrifices to the altar like those old Jews whom God had rejected, declaring to them that obedience was better than sacrifice? Really, he was something like them. He had tried to find favor with God by a correct life and elevated moral principles, when he knew it had been written, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit" and a "contrite heart." It began to seem like insufferable conceit and inso-

lence, as if he had said to God by his life: "You are mistaken in me, I am not a common sinner by any means that I can get down and repent. I have nothing much to repent of. I aim to be right and true, but I cannot go further. Your requirements are too hard for me to comply with, moreover. You have said, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you.' This is most unreasonable and impossible, and I cannot and will not do it."

It was appalling that he had in effect said this to the great and mighty God. He was now having his just deserts in being left to perish. Why had God not long ago stricken him down in anger? And then he remembered "slow to anger, long-suffering, of tender mercy." Certainly he was far out of the way. But where was the remedy? He had not a contrite heart, and he was no more ready to forgive his enemies than he ever had been. His haughty spirit, too; how could the pride ever be taken out and he be made meek and loving? It was an utter impossibility, and yet he longed to have the favor of the glorious Lord, strong and mighty, and he longed to be made fit to dwell with Him through the eternity upon which he might soon enter.

When the weary day had drifted into the night, the heart-sick, desolate man knelt by his

bed of pine boughs. He had not bowed his knee in private prayer since he was a boy, and no words came now, only an infinite longing, an inarticulate cry to the Lord of all from one of His helpless human creatures — the cry of a soul who had come to know his poverty and wretchedness, and now cast himself down at the feet of the Ruler of the universe with a cry for mercy. That was as far as he could reach then. He had read and reread of Jesus Christ the Saviour; but the blessed way of deliverance was as yet hidden from his eyes — so hard is it for the wise to understand the way of salvation.

The next morning the sky was still gray, but there was a lull in the storm, and the traveller, benumbed with cold, rose early, and started in the direction of a group of hot springs that were steaming in the distance under the shadow of a mountain. It was not long though before the storm set in again with renewed force. Wet and chilled through by the time he reached the place, the warmth of the incrusted sand was most grateful. When warmed through he took a survey of his new quarters, and selected a spot between two springs near together. There by the aid of his knife, a priceless treasure, he built another bower of pine branches, carpeted it with small, fine ones, made a bed of the same, and prepared to stow himself away

for a long rest, for he had heard that these storms sometimes lasted several days.

Thistles grew all about his new abode, and in convenient reach was a small, round, boiling spring which he called his dinner pot. In an obscure pocket he fortunately discovered a small ball of twine, so, tying his roots in bunches, he suspended them in the bubbling pot Nature had provided. When thoroughly cooked they were really quite palatable. With warmth and food he could be almost comfortable, except for the fear of wild beasts; but while the storm lasted, the danger from them would not be so great. During several days of imprisonment he employed much of his time in cooking, and writing in his note-book. The chirography was microscopical, for paper was limited; but there were notes on the scenery, the trials and pleasures of the journey, his thoughts about different things, and his adventures. Any employment was delightful. If paper had been more abundant, he would have written a book. He even sighed for an axe that he might chop trees — anything to make the leaden hours go faster.

When all else was done he could think. There was no limit to that nor to the pleasures of memory, thanks to an unusual gift in that line. He enriched his solitude by recalling some of the books he had read: history, poetry,

and fiction. He revisited picture galleries in foreign lands, and, being one who can vividly bring past scenes back to him, he revelled again in treasures of art, painting, and sculpture. Among others he vividly recalled a face of the Christ painted by the one man who has ever caught a satisfying glimpse of what we love to think the face of the Master must have been like, the one pictured face that unites sweetness with divine dignity, and infinite tenderness with power and majesty. He lingered long on it, and passages of Scripture concerning the man, Christ Jesus, the Redeemer, came to him and interpreted themselves in the light of that face. "He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter." "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted; yet He opened not His mouth." "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquities of us all."

Yes, it was all there: the sadness, the self-abnegation, and self-repression. And there, too, was the power and the purity which made hypocrisy and uncleanness slink away at his rebuke. How easy to imagine Him with that face of tender pity saying, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." Passage after passage came to his mind, and then, little by little, the story told itself. At last it all loomed up

before him. The way to God was through Christ, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. The ransom had been paid. The gift of eternal life was held out to all who would receive it, and become loyal subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ. He saw it clearly now. How blind and stupid he had been that he had not seen it long before! He reflected though that since he had grown to manhood the years had been given to hurrying up and down in the pursuit of knowledge. Never had he spent two consecutive hours on "the greatest thing in the world." "The truth shall make you free." If a soul cannot be brought face to face with truth, how then shall it be saved? Although no light from heaven shone round about him as blazed about Saul of Tarsus, the light came into his heart, and he looked into the face of the Christ and saw there pity and forgiveness before he had asked for it. And then there rushed over him a crushing sense of unworthiness, of condemnation, of black ingratitude, and insolent rebellion. Again he knelt in prayer, and this time there were words, and tears, and repentings. He made no compact with the Lord that if He would deliver him from the wilderness he would serve Him all the days of his life. He had not thought of his own misery; it was so wonderful that he was really talking with Jesus Christ who seemed near him. And he made

no promises. He confessed his sin, declaring his bankruptcy, and then cast himself into the arms of his Saviour to do with as He would. He had not the least idea that he had not only come to Christ in the most acceptable way, but had taken a long stride into the religious life.

Some one wise in soul lore has said, "What Christ is to us depends upon what we are willing to be to Him."

When this wanderer in the wilderness, desolate, with spirit subdued and humbled, had cast himself upon Christ with the abandon of a child, God honored the simple faith and revealed Christ as a forgiving Saviour. The troubled soul took Him at His word, and forgot cold and hunger and loneliness in this strange experience. His heart sprang up to meet his Master and to pledge life-long allegiance. In the ardor of his joy he longed to do something for Him. He would be His slave — anything. He had attained to an experience which many reach only after years of struggle. Why should it not be so? The blessing waits only for conditions to be fulfilled.

"When the Comforter is come He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." And sweetly was this promise verified to the young man during those days of imprisonment. Texts long-forgotten came to strengthen faith and deepen trust. It was

precious, too, when night came, to kneel and ask protection, believing that now Jehovah, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Creator and Ruler of the earth, was in Christ a living, loving Friend lighting the gloom. And it brought sweet assurance as he stretched himself on his bed of pine boughs to remember words like these: —

"I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety." "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."

And he did lay him down and sleep, though the voice of the wolf and the mountain lion might often be heard in the distance. The One who created them was his defender now, and if they came and did their worst, death was not the terrible thing it had once seemed to be. Indeed, most things looked different, now that he had a tender, grateful heart. He remembered his escape from the paws of the lion, and thanked God that His protecting care had been about him and delivered him in that strange, unexpected way. Then, too, he had been guided to the hot springs during the cold storm, or he must have perished — another instance of the kind care over him. And now a wonderful thing had come to pass. He had learned to say, "I will fear no evil."

XXIV.

A Weary Way.

DURING some of the time of his imprisonment, Wayne had racked his brain in contriving means for making himself more comfortable. With the aid of his pocket knife and the invaluable ball of twine, he mended his clothes. It was a pitiful sight: the man with an elegant wardrobe and large bank account, repairing tattered garments by punching holes in each side of a rent and lacing it together with twine; and then in a painstaking way trying to fashion a fish-hook from a pin, and rigging out a sapling for a fish-pole, afterward standing a weary while on the shore to catch a few little fishes. No morsel was ever sweeter, though, than they, when cooked in the boiling spring.

Nothing gave Wayne more concern than the want of fire, for he felt that without it he could not hope to endure many storms like the one he had been through; besides, it gave cheer and comfort and safety in the night.

The very day the storm abated and the sun

once more appeared in the sky, Wayne stood on the beach watching the clouds break and drift away. As the sunlight flashed on the waters of the lake it also flashed an idea into his mind, which was, that the lens of his field glass would bring fire from heaven. He tried the experiment at once, and trembled with excitement when he saw the smoke curl from a bit of dry wood in his fingers. Joy! joy! he had fire once more. He thanked God and took courage.

And now he was obliged to be most industrious, fishing and gathering thistle roots in preparation for continuing his journey. He dried the fish and dried some of the thistle roots, cooking others. It cost him a pang to think of leaving his comfortable quarters. The spot was growing dear to him. Nevertheless, he bade it a final farewell, and started once more on his journey with renewed courage, in the direction which he still faintly hoped might lead to the encampment of the rest of the party.

As he walked and mused he fell to imagining their conjectures concerning him and what means they were taking for his rescue. The belief that they were surely searching for him was comforting. He surmised, too, that some of the party might retrace their steps to civilization and secure the aid of experienced men,

thoroughly armed and inured to the hardships of life on the frontier. Macfarlan, he knew, would leave no stone unturned for his deliverance. His father, too, would be informed; his later kindlier judging of his father assured him that everything possible for his rescue would be attempted. As for Aunt Crete, she would arouse the whole country as far as in her lay, and sell the house from over her head, if necessary, to save him. And this reminded him that he must write Aunt Crete about the wonderful change that had come to him there on the wild shores of the beautiful lake, and how her warning, spoken long ago to the boy, had been prophetic.

He almost regretted now that he had sent her a letter just before he had set out on the expedition, telling her of his purpose. What cruel anxieties she had suffered already and would suffer! At least, there was one person on the earth whose prayers in his behalf were strong and fervent. Was there another? Did Enid remember him in that way? It would lighten his burden if he could but be assured of it. He was almost sure that his name came into her prayers in one way, as we ask sadly for a wandering one that he may be reclaimed and saved, but that was different from agonized petitions for those we love as our lives. No, there was but one that he could be sure of,

who thus bore him on her love before the Lord.

He sat down on a log and began the letter in his note-book, that perchance might some day reach her — how, he could not now tell. Perhaps he might be rescued, just as he was at the end; then pitying strangers would take the message from his limp body and send it on its way.

The letter was not quite finished when he became aware of a change in the atmosphere. There was a chill northeast wind blowing. He must have a fire. He examined the torch which he carried with him, but there was not even one smoulderi[illegible] spark of life. He brought out his le[illegible]nd touch-wood; alas! there was no sun, and the sky was overcast with heavy clouds. A fire was impossible. Hours passed and he waited for the sun: it came not, but night, dark and cold and dismal, came. In distress he looked about him.

It was a bare, open place, a bleak hillside with a few scattered pines; and it was all the shelter he could find. Through the long night he could keep from freezing only by brisk walking up and down, clapping his hands, and striking his benumbed feet against a log. When daylight appeared with a still clouded sky, he decided to carry out a resolution made during the longest, most terrible night of his life. He

started back to his comfortable quarters by the lake and hot springs.

It was a tiresome way back, but the delicious warmth was most grateful to his half-frozen frame. Now, he must wait two or three days to recover from the effects of the night of exposure.

This further delay took away the last shred of hope of meeting with his companions, and he set to work to make plans without reference to such an event. Either of three directions that he might take would effect his escape if strength lasted. Accordingly, he drew upon the sand of the beach a map of these several courses with reference to making the lake a starting-point, and set himself down to consider.

One course was to follow a certain river a distance of a hundred miles or more, but that was through a desolate region subject to upheavals and floods.

Another was to cross the country and scale a range of mountains. And the other to retrace his steps over the long and weary way by which he had entered the wilderness. The route by the mountain range was much the shortest, and he decided upon venturing upon it.

Again laying in a supply of food, he started once more from the place that had begun to

seem like home, and this time he felt sure that he was leaving it forever.

That day's journey carried him into apparently impenetrable wilds. At noon the sun came out long enough to give him fire, and he kept a brand alive all the rest of the day by waving it to and fro, sometimes blistering his fingers by the sparks.

Toward night he kindled a fire in the only clear space to be found. Never since his journey began had he been in so dense a growth of pines. The weird light of the fire revealed on all sides a compact and unending growth of trunks of trees with a canopy of dark foliage. Wayne was actually homesick for the lovely lake and the comfortable bed in the warm sand. The howlings of fierce beasts seemed more horrible there in that shut-in wildness. All sorts of spectral shapes disturbed his fitful slumbers. Visions of a pack of yelping wolves grinned at him across the fire, and a fearful monster of the forest glared at him from the thicket with fixed, fiery eyes.

At last the victim of nervous fancies took himself in hand, sat straight up and looked about him. Nothing was to be seen but leaping flames lighting up dark masses of foliage, and tree-trunks straight and tall, tier on tier. He remembered the word of his Lord: "Lo, I am with you always." "I will never leave thee

nor forsake thee." And then, in audible words, he asked the Lord Jesus to abide with him that night, and keep him, as He had promised, "from fear of evil." The dark fancies were exorcised, and he lay down to sweet sleep. From that time on he was not lonely nor nervous.

One walked beside him with whom he talked as friend with friend, and each night he lay down secure in His care.

Another day of toilsome travel over, steep ascents amid the tree tops brought him in sight of the Yellowstone Lake, from whence he must cross the country to the mountain range; that scaled, he could easily reach the settlements in the valley.

Buoyed up by this hope he pushed on, and toward sunset reached a lofty headland jutting into the lake, and commanding a magnificent prospect of mountains and valleys over an immense area. Facing him, in the clear blue of the horizon, rose arrowy peaks in the far distance. There were mountains to left, to right, above him, stretching away in picturesque grandeur, or majestic in lofty domes. It was a vast and wondrous panorama spread out before him, a grand enclosure of lake and mountains with ravines, gorges, and geysers. The mineral deposits of the latter had covered, with a hard, white floor, many square miles of the valleys, and built up craters around the springs. Vari-

ous other springs containing different mineral deposits had stained the pure white of the wide whiteness with bright bands of color. There were deep cañons composed of volcanic rocks, gorgeous with rich coloring; red, yellow, and purple set off against the dark green of the forests, and the white foam of the tempestuous river hurrying through the bottom of the chasm.

The sun, low in the west, glinted here and there, and lighted, to wondrous brilliancy, the jagged rocks and deepened sombre shadows.

It was magnificent! It was marvellous!

Again Wayne forgot hunger, suffering, desolation, everything but exquisite delight, in gazing upon the wondrous scene.

There was a sense of exultation that it was his God, his Father, Friend, and Saviour, who had fashioned this glorious world. He drew nearer to Him on this mount of transfiguration and poured out his heart in adoring worship.

Then he hastened to light his torch at the sun's last rays, and clamber down this rocky descent to the shore of the lake.

It was difficult and dangerous, but in his exalted mood he did not feel it to be so. This continued while he wandered along the beach to gather wood for the night. With thankfulness he lay down to rest at last near a cheerful fire, and fell asleep to the lullaby of the waves.

A Weary Way.

Being quite sure that his party had encamped along this lake, he set out in the morning, buoyed up by the hope of finding food which they had left for him. He made good progress in his journey, by noon struck a trail, and not long after came upon signs that made his heart throb with hope and fear. Evidently they had been there. He searched eagerly for food in the ground and in the trees, but found none. Neither was there any notice to apprise him of their movements. Why, why had they not remembered him? Perhaps it was some other party who had encamped there. He should try to think so, at least. The only evidences that civilized man had ever visited the spot were found in a fork and a tin can. Of these he thankfully took possession. The fork would be useful in digging roots, and the can could serve as a cooking utensil — when he had anything to cook.

The disappointment of finding no food was made up to him a few hours afterward. He had built his campfire for the night, when he discovered something lying on the ground not far away, which proved to be a bird with a broken wing. It was soon killed and dressed, and placed in the tin can to be cooked, making, what the half-starved traveller called, a most delicious soup. The condiments to which he was accustomed were lacking, but never had any-

thing been more relished, and he lay down to sleep with a pleasant feeling that the Lord Himself had sent him food, even as He sent it to His other children long ago in the wilderness.

It was a monotonous life, and yet it had its excitements and adventures. When clambering a steep hillside one day, he became exhausted and lay down in the sage brush to sleep for a few minutes. Awaking, he fastened his belt, and hurriedly pursued his journey. As night drew near, he selected a camping place, gathered wood into a deep heap, and felt for his glass to procure fire before the sun should set. The glass was gone! And with it hope was gone. He lay down in the brushwood and drew some branches over him convinced that the end would soon come. While he lay there with his misery rolling over him like a flood, he tried to think calmly and recall every step of his journey that day. Soon it flashed upon his mind that the glass had probably slipped from his belt when he lay down to sleep on the hillside. He arose at once and began the weary journey back, a walk of perhaps five miles over the hills. Never had he been more overjoyed than the next morning when he came to the spot where he had slept, and found the glass glittering in the sun. There was not money enough in the whole world to buy that glass from him.

A Weary Way.

Another thrilling experience came a few nights later. While the tired wanderer slept soundly amid pine branches, he was awakened by the snapping and crackling of burning foliage, so near him that he felt its hot breath on his face. He sprang up quickly to discover that the forest trees nearest the campfire were in a broad sheet of flame which had crept along to his pine bower, and aroused him none too soon, for the fire was rapidly spreading in a circle about his resting place. Let us quote from his note-book.

"The grandeur of the burning forest surpasses description. Imagine an immense sheet of flame following to their tops the lofty trees of an almost impenetrable pine forest, leaping madly from top to top, and sending thousands of forked tongues hundreds of feet athwart the midnight darkness. It was marvellous to witness the flashlike rapidity with which the flames would mount the loftiest trees. The roaring, crackling, crashing, and snapping of falling limbs and burning foliage was deafening. . . . Afar up the wood-crowned heights the overtopping hills shot forth pinnacles and streamers of arrowy fire, the entire hillside being an ocean of glowing and surging fiery billows."

As soon as it was day, Wayne hastened to leave the desolated spot with blackened, naked trunks ranged about like spectres, and started

to follow the trail of the party who had been in camp, whoever they were. The traces were but faint though, and after pursuing a course by the lake for a time, seemed to turn and go backward, and then become confused. He abandoned it finally, and resolved to follow no more trails, but select, for a landmark, the lowest notch in the range of mountains which he had before proposed to cross. All the day long he struggled over rocky hills, through thickets and matted forests, with the goal ever in view. As he advanced, it seemed to recede. On he went, still another day, bracing up his courage with the thought that, if once he found a pass through that mountain barrier, it would mean hope, and friends, and life, perhaps.

Long before he arrived at the base of the range and eagerly scanned its possibilities it began to grow into a cruel disappointment: an endless succession of inaccessible peaks and precipices, rearing themselves thousands of feet defiant and grim above the plain as far as eye could reach. To scale them was impossible. A wave of despair seized him as he seated himself on a rock commanding an extensive view. He cast his eyes over the route by which he had come and the only one that now seemed practicable for ever getting out. Could he retrace his steps over that labyrinth of mountain and forest, and have had his two days' journey

in vain, or should he persist in trying to find a pass over the mountains?

Why had he been allowed to so waste his strength when he had cast himself on the Lord and asked His protection? And then the old enemy, who can even find a soul in the wilderness, smiled. It is ever a sweet sound to him to hear a saint find fault with his Lord.

No sooner had the evil suggestion come to this sore heart beset on every side, than another question forced itself upon him. Had he ever asked God to point out to him the way out of this wilderness? Never. He had acted as if that were too hard a thing for Him to do. The eye of God looked down upon this trackless wild continually; the paths were all plain to Him. How strange that one who believed this had not thought to ask for guidance before.

He knelt down on the rock at once, and in simple words and strong faith asked to have the way clearly pointed out to him.

For a long time he sat considering whether to remain and search for a pass over the mountain, or return by the way he had come.

Half-awake and utterly worn out, he experienced one of those strange hallucinations that sometimes come to weary nerves. A man with a strong, kind face seemed suddenly to

appear before him, and say with a voice and manner of authority: —

"Go back at once as rapidly as possible. There is no food here, and the idea of scaling those rocks is madness."

"But," said Wayne, "it is too far. I can never live to go through it again."

"You must," his visitor answered; "it is your only chance. Start now."

"My friend, whoever you are," protested Wayne, "I doubt the wisdom of your advice. Just over the mountain, a few miles away, I shall find friends. My clothes are in tatters. My strength is almost gone. I cannot endure a long journey and think I would better make this last attempt."

"Don't think of it!" the man protested. "Turn back. I will go with you. Put your trust in God."

Overcome by the persuasions of this strange guide, and delighted with the thought of a companion, he started and began to plod over the back track. His guide seemed to be invisible except when the doubting traveller was disposed to question the wisdom of the choice of route; then the commanding form appeared again, urging him on with words of encouragement.

XXV.

"*All that is left of him.*"

OUT in that world from which Wayne Pierson had so strangely and so effectually hidden himself, life was moving on in the regular routine that for the most part it continues, even when the grave has closed over the hopes of some. The sturdy blacksmith and his desolate wife lived their stricken lives as best they could, and talked often, softly, in the gathering twilight, of Sarah, and of how she was missed and mourned in the school, in the church, and, indeed, wherever their world reached; and they murmured together occasionally over that sorrow so much greater, they believed, than theirs, and of how the broken-hearted man had tried to bury his grief in the great wilderness.

"He won't find any help there," would the blacksmith affirm, drawing from his great lungs a sigh that was almost like a sob. "He'll have to learn, poor fellow, that the only place to find it is in God. Seems strange that he could go on knowing our Sarah all these years and not find God."

Meantime, in an entirely different world from theirs, those others who had been stricken through the same means lived their lives as best they could. Enid Wilmer and her mother left the little western town where they had suffered such strange experiences two days after the funeral, and went to one of the numerous mountain resorts that had been alluringly pointed out to them, to await the return of the husband and father. Mrs. Wilmer, wise woman that she was, felt that there was something beneath the surface that she did not understand, and watched Enid's white, quiet face with a daily increasing anxiety, and resolved at last to break the strained silence.

Enid sat on the white covered lounge in their room watching the afterglow of the sunset, and the look on her face made her mother's heart yearn over her. She dropped beside her, and, drawing the brown head to her shoulder, let her fingers play among the waves of hair with a caressing movement that Enid knew, as she said tenderly: —

"Isn't it time, darling, for mother to be told all about it?"

If Enid had buried her head in her mother's neck and cried, the mother would have been relieved. Instead, she smiled, a grave sweet smile that had infinite depths of sadness in it, and for a little said not a word.

"What should there be for me to tell, mother dear?" she asked at last, the continued silence compelling her to speech.

"I don't know, daughter; it is for you to say. Do you think I cannot see that my child is bearing a heavy load of pain of some sort? Just what it is or why it is I do not understand, but that it is real I would be blind if I did not see. Have I been so poor a mother that you can afford to shut me out?"

Then the brown head went down on the mother's shoulder, and the words were tremulous with tears.

"O mother! there could never be a dearer, sweeter, wiser mother than you, and if there were anything to tell, don't you know how swiftly I would run to you with it; but there is nothing, mamma, only —"

"Yes, dear, I understand much; it is the 'only' that I want to have explained."

"Mamma, a woman like you knows, without explanation, how hard it would be to lose respect for one who had been a friend."

"Yes, that would be hard. How did it happen?" The mother was resolved now to have the entire story. But she had to wait, and question again.

"I am sure, darling, that you are speaking of Wayne, and that you have, for some reason, lost faith in him. Can you tell me what it

means? Was Wayne more to you than appeared on the surface? I saw his letters, you know. Did they mean more than they said, or was there something else, something that I do not know?"

"It is a thing that cannot be explained in words; it has to be lived. Mamma, he was not *true;* not true to anybody. Do you understand that he was engaged to that poor girl all these years? All the time when he was abroad, and that first summer before he went abroad, when I was at Auntie's. It was an engagement from the very first. Why did he spend his time writing to me, and in visiting with me? Why did he — oh! don't you know how impossible it is to tell it? Don't you *feel* the falseness of it all? And what was she enduring all these years? So true a girl, so noble and self-forgetful and trustful! I feel my face burning with indignation for her. She thought him everything that was good and grand, and so did I until I knew her. Don't you understand?"

"Not quite, my daughter. Wayne may have been very foolish to have continued a friendly correspondence with you during the years, but the intimacy between the two families might have accounted for that; then, when we were abroad, he felt that we were in a sense dependent upon him. He may have given us

more time than was necessary, but he was far away from all other friends, and lonely; I cannot say that I think it was very strange. It may, as I say, have been foolish, but young men often err in judgment, yet it seems not quite fair to call them false. There may have been reasons for the long engagement that we do not understand, may there not? Am I hearing all that there is to hear, darling?"

"Mother, there was a time, — there was one evening, — it was when I was at Effie's, only this summer. I did not tell you about it, because I thought you would have been so frightened over the peril, and there would have been no need. And then, besides, such strange things happened almost immediately that I did not think I could tell you, but — "

And then the mother heard for the first time of that misstep at Table Rock and the awful peril that for a moment threatened her darling. She spoke no word, but tightened her clasp of the cold fingers, and pressed her lips with soundless kisses to the girl's fair cheek. And then she heard of that word which seemed wrung from the soul of the rescuer as he carried her child in his arms to safety: "Oh, my *darling!*"

"I thought he meant it, mamma; meant it in the only way that a true man can; and I was — I was happy in the thought. But the next day he

did not come even to the house where I was, and left the morning after, with only a formal message for me, as if we had been passing acquaintances. I did not understand, but I trusted. I thought there were reasons, noble reasons, for his silence, and that I should soon know all about it. And I did! It was only two weeks after that, that we drove over to Hardin and I met Sarah; and when I went to her room to arrange my hair that afternoon, I saw his photograph on her mantel, and letters in his writing on her table. And, — mamma, you *must* understand the rest.

"I *had* to stay there and find out for myself what it all meant. I couldn't go away. And I found out."

When Mrs. Wilmer did at last speak, what she said was so utterly different from anything that her daughter expected that the girl lifted her head and strained her eyes in the fast waning light to get a view of her mother's face.

Said Mrs. Wilmer: "Poor boy!"

"I mean it, darling," she added, bending to kiss the quivering lips, and the cheeks that had crimsoned under the power and the pain of her story. "I see how it looks to you; but I cannot help a touch of pity for the poor, foolish, headstrong boy who had been inveigled into an engagement in some way that did not represent his heart, and became thenceforth a victim to

his false ideas of honor. I see it all, as plainly as though he had told me the story; and much that was a mystery in his conduct is explained."

Enid twisted herself quite away from her mother's encircling arm and sat erect, her eyes flashing.

"Mother!" she said, "I cannot allow even you to speak in that way of Sarah or her people. She was true and noble and unselfish to a degree that the very angels might envy. I never knew a purer-hearted girl; and those people, — her father and mother, — they are not cultured or educated, but they are true; and they have true nobility, both of them. You do not understand. There was no inveiglement nor deception; not one of them but would scorn to stoop to anything of the kind. They were so honorable themselves and knew so little of the world that they did not for a moment dream of anything dishonorable in the treatment they were receiving. Poor Sarah had no word for him but the loveliest trust. O mamma! mamma!"

The flash of indignation was gone, and she lay weeping and trembling in her mother's arms.

"My darling," said Mrs. Wilmer, speaking softly as to a frightened child, "I think I understand; and I believe with you, that the girl, Sarah, was good and true and pure-hearted.

But at the same time you must let me speak one word for the young man. I have watched Wayne Pierson carefully, even anxiously, through these years, and I believe I understand him. He has faults, grave ones, but falseness is not one of them. If you ever learn the whole story, I fancy you will even find that it is a false idea of truth and honor that has sacrificed him. I have seen people before who fancied that they were bound to live a lie because they had in some way, at some time, been misunderstood. Undoubtedly he has been foolish, and careless, possibly at times reckless, — he is capable of all three, — but never what he considers dishonorable. Perhaps his very gravest fault is inordinate confidence in his own judgment, and it is probably that which has led him wrong. If you ever hear — "

Enid sat up again, her eyes dry, her face burning, and interrupted her mother: "I never want to hear of him again, mamma, never! The man who could speak to me as he did, and look as he did, and be at the same time engaged to be married to a girl whom he had for four long years taught to love and trust him, is a villain. I wish I need never see him again."

Meantime, Aunt Crete was nursing her indignation and astonishment. It all came out,

of course. Matters that we desire to keep from the public always do. Somebody, no one took the trouble to inquire who, interested himself in seeing that not only Aunt Crete but the Pierson household received the local papers of "Hardin Township," and not alone the *Westover Chronicle* but half a dozen other papers as well occupied space with every actual and many imagined details of the tragedy that had shaken the neighborhood. The name of "Wayne Lorimer Pierson" must have been rolled as a sweet morsel on the tongue of more than one reporter, so frequently did the types have to repeat it. And then, instead of returning to Aunt Crete's storm of indignant questions, and to the tender petting that she knew in her heart would come later, her boy had taken himself off to the wilderness!

This, in truth, was the added drop too much in Aunt Crete's cup. In vain she told herself aloud in the privacy of her own room that it was a good thing he had gone, she should think he would want to hide! In her sore heart she knew that she wanted to fold her arms about him at that moment. She took a little satisfaction in writing to his father, that it was no wonder, she was sure, that Wayne had felt compelled to seek his comfort elsewhere, since there was none to be had for the poor boy in his own home.

And the father? Surprise, bewilderment, and indignation struggled with one another for the mastery. Bewilderment was for the most part uppermost. It was all so strange in Wayne! Why had he maintained such secrecy even with his aunt? There must be something that they did not understand. And then he discovered to himself that he had always known that the boy was the soul of honor.

Before any of those most disturbed had had time to settle to the inevitable facts and try to grow used to them, followed the terrible news that the traveller was lost! His travelling companions had returned to camp and reported that after the most vigorous and exhaustive search they had been compelled to abandon him until more help could be secured!

The telegraph blazoned this news over the country, and this time many more papers than the *Westover Chronicle* exhausted adjectives in trying to conjecture the horrors of the situation. The busy city lawyer dropped his briefs and his notes of important engagements, left his numberless trusts, with the briefest of hurried explanations, in the hands of others, and went as far and as fast as steam could take him in search of his son. It was not sufficient to be assured that everything that money and skilled explorers could do was being done: he must go himself. What were business engage-

ments to him now? What was anything? His boy was lost! And Aunt Crete? poor Aunt Crete! she could not go with the father as she longed to do, she could not do anything but wait and pray. We have a habit of using language in that manner, yet, after all, we believe and know that Aunt Crete on her knees set at work the most tremendous forces for relief that it was possible to secure. The poor young man in the wilderness, as often as he thought of her, saw her always on her knees, and drew his hope and his strength from the thought.

They would not let the almost distracted father follow the last rescuing party down the trail. The sturdy men who had volunteered to make another desperate search shook their heads stolidly to his appeal.

"It would only mean two to take care of instead of one," said the keenest-brained of the group; "we need all our strength for him." Then the father coaxed no more, but waited, and got through the terrible days and the awful nights as best he could, in that mining camp; tenderly cared for and watched over by the rough men whose camp it was, and who shook their heads in ominous silence over the folly of his forlorn hope.

There came a day when Wayne, benumbed with cold, trying to struggle on in the face of a

pitiless storm, felt his strength leaving him and knew that he must stop and try to raise a fire, or perish very soon. Knew indeed, or thought he knew, that he must die very soon in any case. Could he not die better if he were warm? Some heaven-sent suggestion had made him preserve a brand from the last night's fire, and he groped about trying to find something not too wet to burn. Again and again he tried to coax the few sparks left in his brand into a flame. His hands were growing too numb to hold it longer, and he found there was no breath in his lungs when he tried to blow upon the sparks.

"It is the end!" he said aloud and with a solemnity that the very rocks might have felt.

And then there was a crackling of the wet bushes near at hand, and the instinct of preservation, which it seems cannot die, made him start and turn his head, and a voice, a *human* voice, said, "Are you Mr. Pierson?"

He stared at them: at the two apparitions who looked down at him from the rocks above. Were they angels? He had not thought that angels looked just like them, yet they knew him. He stared and spoke no word.

"Come on, boys," said the Voice, again, "we must carry him; he is beyond speech, I guess."

And then, suddenly, cliff and forest and the

sense of cold and the apparition of faces and the impression of the Voice faded out together.

They carried him on their sturdy shoulders with slow, sure progress through the wilderness. They were not sure that he was dead; they must get him on a few rods to where they had a fire before they could be certain.

"Dead or alive," said the grimmest of the two, "his father shall have all that is left of him."

They were faithful to their trust. Seven days afterward, in the travellers' quarters at Fort Ellis, surrounded by the appliances and resources of civilization, the lawyer at the bedside of his son watched the struggle going on between life and death. How often he had watched it in the crowded court room! how skilfully and untiringly he had participated in the struggle! how many times he had come off victor! Now he felt himself as powerless as the watch on the stand by the bedside that ticked away the solemn hours. What hours they had been! Seven days of suspense, seven nights of torture, and still the struggle continued and no man knew which should be victor. There were many helpers, and Aunt Crete from her distant home was coming as fast as steam could bring her; but the father had been the untiring watcher day and night. The solemn hours he had spent alone by that unconscious form on the bed! Will the busy,

successful man of the world ever forget them? The world had rolled between himself and his son; he realized that; had he been less busy, less absorbed, many things that had happened need not have happened. Should he never be able to say those words he had planned long ago to say, "My boy, forgive me!" Ah, but he realized a more tremendous truth than that. The world had rolled between himself and his God! Once he used to know God; to be on intimate terms with Him, to think of Him as a friend. Now he felt a million miles removed from Him and yet felt alone with Him, he and God! He dropped to his knees at last, the man who had not prayed in a score of years, and cried out in his agony, "Oh, God! Oh, *God!*" At first it was all that he could say. But when did a soul come with even an unvoiced agony to God and not receive instant response?

After that he had prayed and *prayed:* and his only moments of relief were found upon his knees. He was kneeling that night, and praying: trying to get used to the words, "Thy will, not mine;" trying to get used to the awful gulf of separation that he felt was widening, and *widening*.

A pair of great eyes from the bed were watching him. A wondering voice spoke softly:—

"Father! did you die too? Are we both in heaven?"

XXVI.

By the Way of Peace.

THE father's heart leaped with joy when he heard that voice, scarcely above a whisper though it was. He bent over the bed, pressed a kiss on the white brow, then silently gave to the patient a spoonful of nourishment, drew the covering over him and said gently, "Hush."

The two looked an instant into each other's faces and smiled. Then the son closed his eyes again in sleep and the father, gazing anxiously, thought within himself that the face on the pillow had the whiteness and the content of one who is sleeping his last sleep. Nevertheless he dared to hope that the fever had abated, and the crisis was being safely passed.

And so it proved. The days of convalescence that followed were precious, when the father and aunt tenderly nursed their dear one back to life. The father and son drew near to each other, forgetting the hateful past and rejoicing in the old-time trust. As Wayne grew stronger his two auditors never tired of listening

to every detail of that terrible month when he was entombed in the wilderness.

While Aunt Crete rested, the other two enjoyed many an hour of quiet talk. They did not speak of the chief cause of the long alienation between them — Leon; it was a sore subject for the father. He would long ago have admitted to his son that he was aware there had been just cause for complaint and that he had judged him harshly, but that Wayne, in the past few years, at every interview had seemed to him so proud and cold and self-sufficient that the father's own pride had never allowed him to speak the conciliating words. Now pride was gone and, in its place, was an infinite tenderness. His son was dead and was alive again; he was lost and was found.

As for Wayne, he suspected that his father had received clearer vision as to the true state of things and carried a burden in proportion. Not for worlds would he add to it, now that he knew what depths of tenderness for himself had been hidden in that great heart. Moreover . had scarcely thought of Leon for weeks. Now, with returning strength, he refused to allow his mind to dwell upon anything that might disturb the blessed peace which had come to him.

There was another theme, too, of which they did not speak, that was ever in their thoughts. Wayne Pierson had bravely faced lions and

wolves, had stared starvation in the face, and walked hand in hand with death for weeks, and his spirit had not flinched. But now his heart throbbed wildly, and he shrank and trembled when he wished to speak a few words to his father about the things that are said to belong to another world, but, in reality, should be the chief concern of this one. And in like manner the father, who was accustomed to plead before high tribunals, with intellectual giants as critics, yet hesitated to speak a few simple words to his own son in the quiet of his room, though he longed to tell him of the decision he had made and counsel him to follow his example. Wayne was filled with intense desire that his father might have the rest of soul that had been given to him. It would be difficult, he reasoned, for his father, with a nature more inclined to command than to submit, and with habits of lifelong unbelief, to accept the simple gospel and in lowliness of spirit account himself a sinner to be saved.

The day came, though, when Wayne could keep silence no longer. Mr. Pierson was soon to return to his business, leaving Aunt Crete with the invalid. Wayne was sitting up for the first time on a lovely morning; the cheery sunshine looked in at the window, lighted the peaks of a distant purple mountain, and sent sparkles over the face of a lake near by. It

reminded Wayne of the lake in the wilderness, and he began suddenly, lest his courage fail.

"Father, I have something still more wonderful to tell you of which I have not yet spoken, and you must know it before you go. It is to revolutionize my whole life, I trust. Perhaps you will be surprised to know that I have become a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. He followed me, a lost sheep, to the wilderness, and found me before the men did that you sent out."

And then the father listened with keen interest while the son told the story in low, tender tones, adding at the close: "Perhaps it may seem like superstition to you that I believe He guided me to my deliverers, even through the hallucination of a tottering brain. You can have no idea of the blessed comfort it was to me to have that wise, kind, strong man come and tell me just what to do. Sometimes I have wondered if it were irreverent to believe that the Good Shepherd Himself really came over the dark, rough way by my side and cheered me with a kind word now and then as He sometimes did for His disciples when He was on the earth. Certainly if I had not followed a voice that distinctly told me to turn about and go in an opposite direction, and in a way contrary to my judgment and inclinations, I should have been far from the place where I was rescued."

Wayne, at first, had his eyes fixed on the distant hills while he talked, dreading to meet an unsympathetic glance from his father, but presently turned his head, expecting an incredulous, pitying look, and was amazed at the joyful expression of his father's face while he wiped away the tears and grasped his hand, exclaiming, "Thank God!"

"My son," he said, "you are braver than I. I have not yet had the courage to confess to you that while I waited here in an agony of suspense I prayed for the first time in long years. I dare not say yet that I belong to Him. I only know that I asked Him to come into my life. Whether He will receive me I know not, but it is my purpose to serve Him for the rest of my life. And now, dear boy," he went on in a broken voice, "I want you to forgive the mistakes I made through all these past years, and the injustice and harsh judgments of which I have been guilty. I begin to see what you must have suffered, and —"

"Father, don't!" Wayne interrupted. "Please don't say any more such things. It is all right now. Much of the trouble was my own fault. I was too sensitive, and I was imperious, and cold, and proud, and unforgiving, and everything that was unlovely. You forgive me and overlook all that has been wrong in my past. We can begin to live this new life

together. Oh, father, how glad and happy I am to know that you, too, have come to Him."

"I hope I have," Mr. Pierson said humbly. "The way is not very clear as yet. I am like one groping in the dark. It seems presumptuous for one who has spent years and years in ignoring God, and living in defiance of His commands, to come when he is growing old and offer the dregs of his life to the Lord and expect to be accepted."

"But, father, it is written, 'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely,'" Wayne said earnestly. "I think many of us stumble just there. We cannot rid ourselves of the notion that we must pay for the favor of God by a good life, and we will not believe that pardon and justification are gifts, and that a good life is the result of believing in Christ and not a means to secure His favor."

"It is all mystery to me, my son," Mr. Pierson said with a sigh, "I thought I knew the way once, but the knowledge must by this time be buried under heaps of rubbish. I only know that when I was in distress about you, I felt constrained to call upon God. So don't misunderstand my state. I have no sort of feeling, and it is a mere cold decision. I cannot even pray with any satisfaction to myself. I am simply persuaded that God has claims upon me and I want to meet them. I may

never succeed in becoming a Christian. It seems an uphill road I will frankly confess."

"Why father, is not that the first step in any undertaking: to will to do it? And is not the will the real self?"

"Well, my boy, you seem to have got far along the way yourself. I shall have to learn of you. Who taught you, I wonder?"

"The Spirit of God I do believe," Wayne answered reverently, — "the Spirit applying the truth learned long ago when I was a boy, thanks to mother, and recalled as I told you, in those desolate days when I had to go over everything that I ever knew to employ my mind and so preserve my reason. Besides, you know, I had time to think."

"Yes, I see you have the advantage of me. I have no truths stored away to bring forth fruit."

"But father, the scheme of salvation is so beautiful and simple; the Lord Jesus Christ taking our place, bearing our sin, and handing over a pardon to any of us who will ask; requiring only in return that we love Him and acknowledge that He has bought us and paid for us, and so of course we rightfully belong to Him. Excuse me, father, for seeming to set myself up as a teacher, but I do long to have you see it. You believe, don't you, that we are all sinners and that Christ came into the world to save us?"

"Oh, yes, I have no doubts about anything except myself. It seems a thing almost impossible to turn a cold, hard, worldly heart, with not a spark of love for God, into such a Christian as your mother was, for instance. I cannot say that I feel myself a great sinner. I don't feel anything about it as I ought, but I know I am."

"Why then," the son said eagerly, "hear this. It is one of mother's verses, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin,' and this, 'If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.' There is His word for it. When it came to me in that way, father, I just trusted Him and believed I was forgiven, not because I felt it, but *because He said so.* We cannot depend upon our feelings. If we have put our wills on His side and trust alone in His atoning sacrifice for our salvation, why may we not now call ourselves 'sons of God.' We could never make ourselves any more fit if we were to live hundreds of years. Don't you know that old hymn that mother used to sing? —

> "Let not conscience make you linger,
> Nor of fitness fondly dream,
> All the fitness He requireth
> Is to feel your need of Him."

That night when they two bowed in prayer together and the father voiced his childlike

trust in Christ, the son following in fervent pleading, both felt that the bond between them, strong and dear, was nevermore to be broken.

"And did you never get any trace of the horse again?" Aunt Crete asked Wayne one day, when she was making him go over the story of his exciting adventures for the hundredth time.

"Never; I suppose poor Liph met with the same fate that would have come to me by this time if I had not been rescued just when I was."

Somebody else had heard of Liph, though. A trapper told, that, as he pushed his way through the dense forest, setting traps for wild animals, he discovered a horse with a broken limb entangled in the brushwood. Nothing could be done for him but to put him out of misery. The man took possession of everything he found strapped upon the horse except a letter he found addressed to "Miss Enid Wilmer." The pity that had prompted him to shoot the suffering animal moved him to take good care of the letter and send it on its way as soon as he reached a mail station. "For," reasoned one of Nature's noblemen in the rough, as he stood alone in the woods, "likely as not this letter's for some young feller's sweetheart away down east. Maybe she'll never see

him again, but she shall have this letter to comfort her anyhow."

It was one day while Wayne was still in the wilderness, and the Wilmers tarrying in the little mountain resort on account of health and business interests, that the letter had reached Enid.

Being remote from newspapers and with mails at rare intervals, almost shut out from the world in fact, they were ignorant of what had happened to Wayne.

Enid was on the way to her room for the night when the worn, begrimed letter was given her. The handwriting on the envelope set her pulses throbbing wildly even though she thought she had shut and barred the door of her heart against the writer. She looked the letter over curiously, dreading to open it. When at last she broke the seal and read, surprise, sorrow, and delight struggled for the mastery. But youth and joy belong to each other and joy was uppermost, irradiating her face and raining down soft tears.

He was not false hearted. He had loved her and her only all these years. This precious letter had come straight from the depths of the wilderness, straight from the true heart of the writer. Nothing in the universe could ever make her think ill of him again. Why had she ever doubted for one moment but that

there was some satisfactory explanation of circumstances, however they might appear. She hated herself for entertaining degrading thoughts of him. He may have erred, but it was on the side of nobility and not to please himself. The night waned, but she heeded it not. A wondrous thing had come to pass. God himself had planned that the highest, best joy of life next to loving Him should be the joining of two human hearts in one, and now He had sent this great joy to her. It was too much to believe. If the cold, hungry, desolate man who sat that night in darkness that might be felt could but have had a glimpse into the heart of this maiden, why then the darkness would have been light.

The Wilmers were about to continue their journeyings still farther west in the region of new mines, and the next day was the one set for their departure. Enid's mother was not a little puzzled at her daughter's appearance in the morning. Of late the girl's face had worn an expression of weariness and indifference, and sometimes there were rigid lines like one who held some strong emotion in check. What was her mother's surprise that Enid seemed to have taken on again the old bloom and light and joy, gay and bright as a creature of the air. What could it mean? She watched her furtively all that day of a weary journey from an opposite seat in the car and was perplexed. Not

a trace of fatigue was apparent. She seemed absorbed in a happy dream even to the neglect of the grand scenery through which they constantly passed.

In the twilight, though, when her father had gone to the other end of the car to visit with a new acquaintance, Enid slipped into the seat beside her mother, nestled her head against her, and told her softly the contents of the letter. Then there followed a long whispered conference such as only loving mothers and daughters know how to enjoy.

It would seem that all earthly ecstasies are doomed to be short lived. It was but a day or two before a shadow crossed the bright sky. A troublous question began to take shape in Enid's mind. Wayne Pierson was not a Christian. Could she belong to one who did not belong to her Lord? The answer to her own question came like a blow, shattering her beautiful hopes. She could not, she must not. Then she flushed as she reflected that he had never really asked her to be his wife. Perhaps he never would. She could love him though and pray for him; then leave it all with the Lord. Certainly, she should do nothing that her Master could not approve, whatever sorrow it might bring to her life. To this resolution she settled down and was still happy in a subdued way until another awful shadow closed about her.

And this came a day or two after the travellers had reached a point where they were to tarry for a time. Enid had come in from the garden of the friend's house where they were visiting, her arms filled with flowers to arrange in vases. Just as she entered the room noiselessly, she heard her father pronounce Wayne Pierson's name, and saw a look of grief and horror on her mother's face.

"What is it? Please tell me quick!" the girl exclaimed before they were aware of her presence.

The father and mother looked at each other helplessly. The truth must come out.

"My dear child," the father said, taking the unwelcome task upon himself, "we have just heard some bad news about Wayne. It seems he became separated from the rest of the party and has been — been lost several days in the wilderness."

He could not tell the whole terrible truth that he had been lost a month and there was scarcely a ray of hope that he might be found alive.

The stricken girl, with a face as white as the lilies she held, dropped them and went swiftly away to her own room.

XXVII.

"*The Lord thy God hath led thee.*"

IN fiction one reads or used to read a good deal about broken hearts, but the truth has always been that in real life hearts bear terrible strains and do not break.

Enid Wilmer did not die; she did not even sink under this last blow so peculiar in its nature, and so fearfully wearing upon a sensitive organism. Again and again, as the weary hours stretched themselves into days, she told herself that if there had only been a grave to weep over she could have borne it. But to have him LOST! Was ever trial like unto her trial?

She had opportunity to test whether other forms of trial were less hard to bear than this. The day came when the papers heralded from one end of the country to the other that the lost was found! Yet the very next line of type saw to it that no one's joy should be profound. He was "breathing," when rescued, that was all. Not the slightest hope of a rally. Physicians everywhere said that such a hope

was an absurdity. Probably before that paper went to press the end had come. "Still," said the types, "it is a comfort that the rescuing party will be able to bring back to his stricken friends the lifeless body."

Was it a "comfort"? Enid Wilmer sat and stared at the paper with great tearless eyes, and wondered vaguely, as though she were somebody else, whether there was any comfort to be had from it. His body! a grave! She had thought that she could bear that. Could she?

What days were those that dragged their length along, measured only by the morning and evening mails and the newspapers! There were times in her life, afterward, when Enid would turn faint at the sight of the mail being suddenly brought in. This time she did not faint. She seized and devoured what news there was. It was meagre enough, and it would seem as if those cruel types had forgotten how to spell a single hopeful word. The victim was simply breathing; prolonging the awful struggle; "utterly hopeless;" — "those who loved him could only pray for his speedy release."

Some of those who loved him could not pray for *anything*, in words. Enid was much on her knees, and she knew afterward that she prayed, because she lived; but all her soul was conscious of was that she whispered the

name "Jesus" and seemed sometimes to rest her head upon His pitying breast. After a time there came the hardest strain of all. Not only the local papers but the great city dailies seemed to weary of their theme. They had gleaned every possible particular of the tragedy, and the central figure in it, the one who could have told so much, lay in a hopeless lethargy; apparently there was no change from day to day, and none could be hoped for save that one when the clay should cease at last that wondrous power that we call breathing. Why should the types repeat each day the same story? When the end should come, they would rouse again to conspicuous head-lines and print and reprint each minutest detail; meantime, they turned to other and more exciting themes. It was during those days of awful silence that Enid began to feel as though she must pray to be allowed to die.

What her mother was to her throughout that time, Enid could never tell. The nearest that she came to it was to say sometimes with a look in her eyes that some mothers might have envied, "There is no one in all the world quite like a mother! God makes them understand."

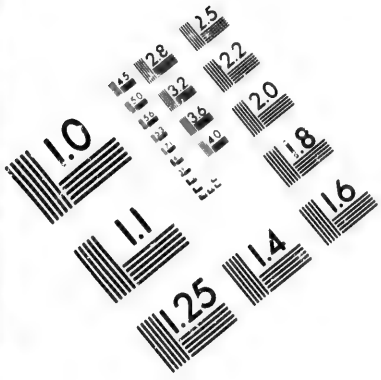
Yet Mrs. Wilmer would have said that she did nothing: nothing at all. Perhaps that was it. She did not attempt doing or saying. She made not the slightest effort to comfort or to

condole with her stricken daughter. There was no meaningless attempt to make that look hopeful which, humanly speaking, was hopeless; such an effort is on the face of it so often false that the hungry hearts of those stricken turn away as from a nauseous potion. Mrs. Wilmer simply hovered about her daughter, caring for her in a hundred little, unofficious, nameless ways, shielding her as by a divine instinct from eyes and speech that would have probed; bringing her a flower now and then, and speaking of them and of other safe commonplaces in a quiet, natural tone; not demanding that Enid should be interested in any of these matters, but simply taking it for granted that a thread of interest still existed. And Enid was grateful to her, oh, so grateful for her silence!

"If mamma had tried to comfort me," she said afterward, "I know I should have gone insane; but she didn't; she just held me close, and waited."

Speaking of flowers, there were times when Enid hated them. They belonged to the days long ago when she was young and life had looked a beautiful thing. She had a spray of evergreen, small and shrivelled and turned yellow, "evergreen" only in name; but nothing ever grew, nothing ever would grow, she believed, more precious than that. It made





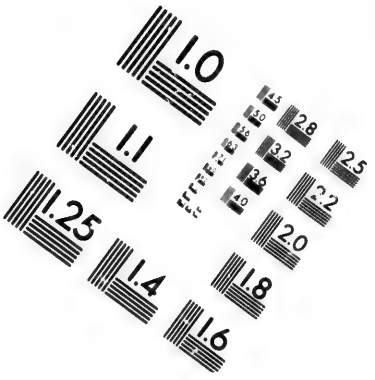
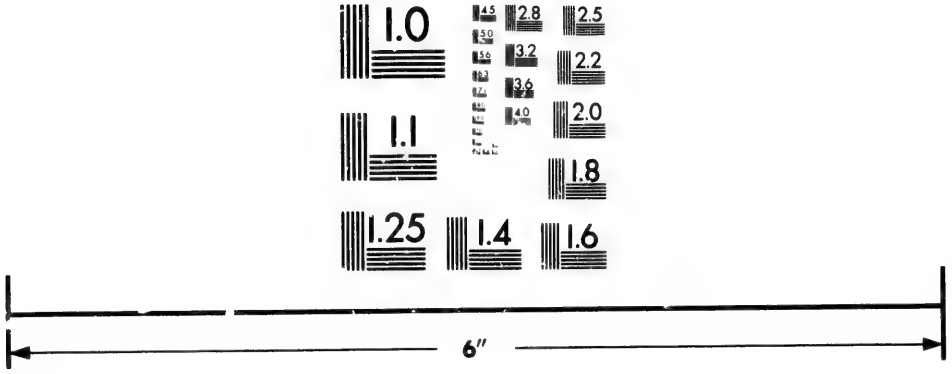
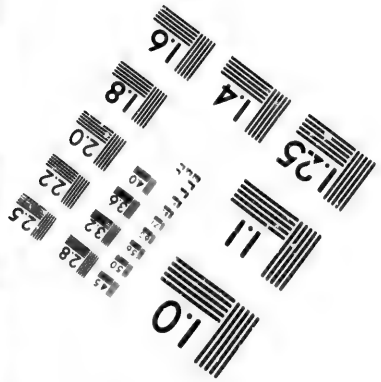
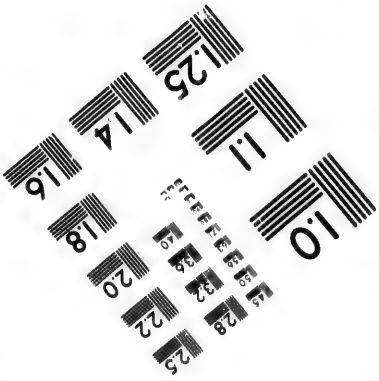


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her think of roses, white roses, one in particular; how eloquent his eyes had been when he hid it away! And then, for a while she would feel that she hated roses; they had promised so much and been so — no, they had not been false, that one had not, he had not; he had simply been a victim of circumstances, and she had been cold and cruel during all that time when she might have helped him! Poor little woman! fighting with life and its problems and its caverns there in her youth!

One day there came to her a great resolve.

"Mother," she said, speaking out of a silence that had lasted for more than a hour, and had been of such a nature that the watching mother had thought well not to disturb it, "I must go there. It isn't that I cannot bear it any more; it is that I ought to go. OUGHT! do you understand, mother? Even though he cannot speak, nor move, he may be able to hear, — they are sometimes; and there may be no one near him who will speak the name 'Jesus' in his ear. Mother, he must not go down into that silence without HIM, *he must not!* I can bear all the rest, but not that. God does not want me to bear it; He wants him saved!"

"She was more excited than I have seen her before," said the mother, telling the father about it, while together they made hur-

ried preparations for a journey. "I felt that to humor the idea was the only way. Don't you think so?"

The father drew a heavy sigh; it was hard to have his one flower stricken, but he answered promptly: —

"Oh, yes; I had expected that — wondered indeed that it had not come before. It is not so very far away, and fortunately it is in a region that tourists visit, so you will have the conveniences of modern travel about you. The worst is that this meeting of mine-owners prevents my going with you; if Enid could have waited for a few days — but you are used to travelling, and I will follow you so soon as the meeting is over."

It was all arranged very quickly. To outsiders Mrs. Wilmer and her daughter were a couple of restless tourists who could not be satisfied long in any place.

"They can't even wait until he can go with them!" explained one of the lady boarders to another. "He can't go until after some big meeting of which he is secretary, and it is to be held next week; but my young lady has taken a notion to go now, so go she must. If my husband had a wife and daughter like that, I wonder what he would do?"

It was not a very long journey to those accustomed to travel, and by evening of the

second day following their departure, Mrs. Wilmer and Enid were sheltered in a boarding house that had been recommended to Mr. Wilmer, and was situated in as quiet and lovely a region as any they had yet seen. They had learned from the papers that the sick man had been brought by easy stages to a town within three miles of this village, that the physicians who were attending him might be able to reach him daily.

During the last two hours of their journey, Mrs. Wilmer felt that she had reason to regret their hasty departure without her husband's strength and judgment to lean upon. As they neared the place where they might expect to hear news of the sick one, if indeed he were yet living, Enid's nervous excitement increased to such a degree that her mother was seriously alarmed. Every time the car door opened, she was seized with a fit of trembling. Yet her nervousness took the form of shrinking from news.

"Don't ask, mother!" she said with a tone that had almost a command in it; "don't ask anybody. Wait! let us get under cover somewhere before we hear."

And then the mother fell to wondering how she should manage the news. He must be living, else the papers would be full of the story, but suppose the end was just at the

door? How should she tell Enid? How prepare her for the ordeal?

Like many things for which we try to plan, nothing happened as she had expected. News came to them suddenly, without time for preparation. Mrs. Wilmer had stepped into the hall to wait for a messenger, and had left the door ajar because she had a nervous fear of leaving Enid alone even for a moment, and these sentences floated up to them, spoken in clear, voluble tones: —

"Oh yes, he is getting well. It seems almost a miracle, doesn't it? You know he was thirty-seven days in that awful wilderness! Only think of it!"

"Yes, I know; he lay at death's door, as you may say, for I don't know how many days, but he is gaining fast now. The doctor who attends him was in to see my auntie to-day, and I asked him all about it. He says the young man sat up for several hours yesterday, and is improving steadily."

Mrs. Wilmer was back with her hand on the door knob long before these sentences were concluded, but Enid had heard the voice; she raised her hand with a gesture for silence and listened as for her life to every word. Then she spoke quietly: —

"Don't be frightened, mamma, I am not going to faint, I'm going to — to try to behave

myself now. Oh, mother!" And the long pent-up excitement vented itself in a burst of tears.

Mr. Pierson and his son were spending their last evening together. The time had come when the man of affairs could not longer delay his departure; two telegrams received that day had helped him to realize the need for haste. There was really no longer any reason for delay. Wayne's strides back toward health were astonishing his physicians as much as anything about the strange experience had done; but the father, having found his lost son in more senses than one, was loath to part from him again. Still, Aunt Crete was there, and Wayne was coming home as soon as it should seem wise to undertake the journey, and the busy lawyer drew a long breath as he told himself that he must go away from paradise out into the world again.

On this evening that he had meant should be a very pleasant one, his face was shadowed. He had been reading a letter from his wife, and it had that in it which troubled him. During the weeks that Wayne had been able to visit and to listen to reading, his father had fallen into the habit of reading aloud to him large portions of his letters from home. His wife used a ready pen, and her descriptions of home experiences were racy and enjoyable. Wayne

had himself asked for news from home, and had astonished and delighted his father's heart by remarking cheerily that "mother" was a capital letter-writer. In truth, the young man, in the abundant leisure which awaits the convalescent, had gone all over that ground and, as he expressed it, "had it out with himself." Looked at in the clear light of his recent experiences he was enabled to tell himself positively and sincerely that he had been unjust to his stepmother. He had accused her of coming between himself and his father; and, in the sense that he had meant it, this was simply not true. She had perhaps not wasted much love upon him, but had he given her any reason for loving, even for liking him? Holding his enlightened conscience steadily to the work, he was able to see that from almost the first he had allowed his dislike for the boy, Leon, to prejudice him against his mother. Leon had undoubtedly worked him mischief, and had meant to; and the mother had been faithful to her boy. Why not? He would have despised her if she had not been. True she had been utterly blind to his faults, but that was not so hopeless a trait in a mother as to be beyond excuse. He could see now that she had tried, with the light she had, and with the prejudices she had against him, — faithfully nursed by Leon, — to be good to him.

"She has really done her best," was this young man's honest conviction after long thought. "It wasn't *my* mother's best — how could it have been? But I sincerely believe it was hers, and if I had but known enough to meet her halfway, things might have been — better than they were."

After that, he electrified his father by asking in cordial tone: "Is that thick letter from mother? What's the news at home?" And that had opened the way for the readings from those thick letters, that had drawn from Wayne the gracious compliment, and had made his father happier than he had been since his son was a child.

Mrs. Pierson on her part was certainly doing "her best." Her letters, the father told his son, had been overflowing with sympathy and sorrow for him while the strain was heavy; again and again she had expressed the wish that she were there to help care for the sick one. Then as the anxiety lessened she had grown cheerful and hopeful even before others had dared to be so. And then she had begun to talk about the home coming quite as a matter of course.

"Tell Wayne he has no idea what a good nurse I am," she wrote. "I had a long experience in caring for my dear father; I am prepared to read to him, or write letters for him,

or make better invalid dishes to tempt his appetite than he ever had before. My powers in that line are not half appreciated."

But the thick letter that had arrived that day had shadowed the father's face; he had not offered to read any of it aloud; and Wayne had wondered, and queried whether his father would like it if he should ask for it.

Here is one of the paragraphs that had troubled the father: —

"We have so long had thought only for Wayne, that it seems hardly proper to begin about anything else; but matters have not meanwhile been standing still. I think I may tell you that my long-cherished hopes in regard to dear Leon are to be realized. You know how earnestly I have desired that he should choose the daughter of my dear old school friend for a wife, and he writes me at last that it is a positive engagement. He has been spending a week with them and the matter is all settled, and a speedy marriage is being planned for. In truth, Leon says that they are only waiting until you get home and the house has settled down into its natural state before he will be ready to bring his bride for a father's and mother's blessing. He says some very sweet things about what a father you have been to him, which I shall not tell you for fear of your being puffed up. But I am sure, dear,

you have never known how fully Leon appreciates your love and care. He writes also that he has given up all his 'harum scarum' ways and is going to 'bone down to business' in a way that will delight your heart. I am sure, now that your soul is throbbing with gratitude for the restoration of your own dear boy, you will be ready to sympathize with me in this new hope I have for Leon. A few words of that kind mean so much from him."

There was more of it, but the father had not the heart to read further. He did not believe in Leon as his wife did. He had only too good reason to doubt his sincerity in anything; the later years of his life had been spent in trying to shield his wife from a knowledge that could bring her only pain. But it was not this thought that troubled him now.

He had heard from his son's lips the story of poor Sarah, the blacksmith's brave, faithful daughter—and if father and mother Thompson could have heard the story as he told it, they would have respected even more the man whom they looked upon as almost their son. Mr. Pierson had understood better than his son had imagined that he could. And in the glow of his gratitude for the sympathy bestowed, Wayne had gone a step further and mentioned Enid Wilmer. Of course there could, in the nature of things, be very little indeed said on

such a subject; and he was by no means sure that that little was understood. But it was the memory of it that had shadowed the father's face, and caused him to thrust the letter hastily into his pocket and read no word of it to Wayne.

XXVIII.

"By a way that they know not."

BUT later in the evening, less than half an hour, indeed, before that train would carry him away, the father resolved upon what he ought to do. Wayne had not spoken plainly; perhaps it was because nothing was plain. There was, possibly, only a vague, misty dream of a possible future. It might not have taken strong hold in any way. There might be time to prevent his dreaming over it and fixing the fancy in his heart to bear more pain. If he could save the boy an hour of pain in the future, shouldn't he do it?

The longer he thought about it the more sure he felt that nothing very serious could have happened as yet; the other experience had been too recent. Which statement will show you how well the father understood the situation! He determined to ignore that little hint of Wayne's; to act as though he had not heard it, and to give him the word simply as an item of news. So he said, with as easy an air as he could assume: —

"By the way, Wayne, I have a bit of home news for you. I know, my boy, better than you think I do, what a trial one person connected with us has been to you; and I am sure you will understand why I cannot speak of it more plainly."

Wayne turned sympathetic eyes upon his father, and bowed his head. "I know, father, of course you cannot; never mind. We are not children any more. I shall not let it rankle."

"God bless you, my boy, I had hoped to have it all — very different. Well — Leon is to be married now, it seems. I hope that will do something toward making a man of him; marriage sometimes does. His mother is glad over it. You may have known that she has cherished the hope for years that he and the daughter of her old friend, Mrs. Wilmer, would live their lives together, and it seems that is to be. His mother writes that they only await our getting settled at home and all well again, before there will be a wedding. Hark! that's the whistle of the train at the other station, isn't it? I shall just have time to make it. Well, my boy, good-by."

He prided himself on the skill with which he had accomplished it, and rejoiced in the hope that his fears had been groundless. Wayne had taken the information with utmost

calmness. That little hint had not meant, after all, what he had fancied.

This is, perhaps, as much as we really know, a great deal of the time, concerning the inner life of those with whom we are most closely associated. Outward calm, long years of experience had schooled Wayne Pierson to observe. The tumult that raged within would be hard to picture in words. Fortunately it was night and he could be alone. Aunt Crete came tapping at the door soon after she heard his father's rapid retreating footsteps, to know if she could do anything for the comfort of her dear boy. He answered her in his usual quiet voice, then locked his door and came face to face with that battle that he had believed there was no need to fight. As often as he had thought of Leon Hamilton during his convalescence, and the thought of him had not come often, he had felt, as has already been intimated, that the subject was not of sufficient importance to be dwelt upon. Tremendous issues had intervened and filled his mind, and henceforth Leon Hamilton and his movements could be viewed with indifference. So he had fondly believed. He had yet to learn that the human heart does not put aside its life-long besetments so easily. He had yet to discover that he was to be called upon to feel something besides indifference for his life-long enemy. Somewhat to his after

astonishment, the strongest emotion roused within him by his father's item of news was that of fierce unreasoning hatred toward his stepbrother. The whole bitter story of his life of trial and pain and peril seemed to roll itself before him like a panorama, with always Leon Hamilton as the power behind the scenes. And now to add the last stroke! That fair, pure life to be sacrificed to *him!*

Was there room for other feeling than hatred? He writhed in agony upon his bed, and felt the current of passion all the more fiercely because he gave no voice to it, but repeated it in his heart that he hated, *hated,* HATED that man, and had a right to hate him; and that a God of truth and justice ought not to permit him longer to pollute the earth.

Suddenly came a voice not from outside, not audible to other than himself, but strangely, solemnly distinct to him, "He that hateth his brother is a murderer!" It would not do to hide behind the weak little subterfuge which had sheltered him as a child, that Leon Hamilton was no brother of his. He had grown wiser in some things, at least, and had begun to have some faint idea of what God means by that word "brother." It was one of the names that had been applied to Jesus Christ, "The Elder Brother."

The voice sobered him; not with a sense of

fear, but of humiliation. His brother, his "Elder Brother," what had He not borne from him? What had He not forgiven him. "Is the disciple greater than his Lord?" Bible words learned long ago and long ago forgotten trooped back and hovered about him. It was a long, fierce battle, the fiercest by far of his stormy life. When it was over he was physically spent, so that he was glad to lie in utmost physical quiet. But there was mental quiet as well. Wayne Pierson had tested severely the power of Jesus Christ to conquer the fiercest passions of the human heart and had proved Him conqueror. He who is Himself THE TRUTH had forced this lover of truth and honor to speak naked truth to his own soul. It had not been enough for him to say that he would forgive Leon Hamilton; stern conscience, that had waited for its hour, came forward and insisted upon his owning that there was not so much to forgive as he had all his life indulged himself in believing. Shorn of heroics and put into everyday plain talk, what was the case?

Leon Hamilton had been an untruthful, coarse, selfish, heedless boy; yes, he had; but there had been other such boys who had been borne with, and suffered for, and watched over, and *won*. If he, Wayne Pierson, had been the sort of boy he might have been, the kind his

mother had prayed that he might be, could he not have won his stepbrother long ago? Later in life, what had Leon done but act out the nature that he had allowed to develop? And what had Wayne Pierson done but much the same? That the two natures had developed differently was owing to a thousand subtle influences, perhaps, over which neither boy had much control. That they might both have chosen the Elder Brother and been guided by Him into other lives was solemnly true. Instead, the lives of both had, in the sight of God, been a long series of failures.

As for the item of news that had brought about such a storm of passion, his conscience asked him if it was strictly honest to blame Leon Hamilton for that. Ought he to be blamed for admiring and reaching after and longing to win such a woman as Enid Wilmer? If he had honorably wooed and won her, if she had actually *chosen* him, could he be blamed for that? It was bewildering, it was incomprehensible, he found it impossible to reconcile his knowledge of the girl with such a state of things, but there could of course be no mistake this time; and, after all, it had nothing to do with the question at issue. What had to be decided was whether he, Wayne Pierson, was an out and out follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, or whether he meant only to follow Him

when the way was smooth and there were no crosses to be seen ahead.

It was, as has been said, a fierce battle; but in the end Wayne Pierson prayed for the soul of his stepbrother, that it might be redeemed to God; that he might learn to think of and speak of him as his brother, and that if such were indeed the will of God — he paused long before that sentence, waiting, on his knees, then he finished it — he might learn to think of Enid Wilmer as his sister!

"I'm afraid you did not sleep at all last night," Aunt Crete said, scanning him closely, and speaking anxiously. "I thought I heard you moving about once; I sat up and listened, and had a mind to come in. You look like a ghost. What is the matter? Didn't you sleep well?"

"Yes," said Wayne, with a smile as quiet as the morning; "I was late in sleeping, but I slept well at last; unusually well. I dreamed of my mother; I thought she came and kissed me good night as she used, and called me her dear boy."

Aunt Crete was puzzled and troubled. What should keep her boy awake half the night if he was doing well in every way? She asked a number of questions, judiciously, through the day, and learned some things and guessed at others. Before night she had heard what

there was to tell about the piece of news from "home."

"Fiddlesticks!" she said to herself; "if a hundred and fifty Leon Hamiltons should come to me with such a story as that, I should have sense enough not to believe it. Men are all fools! 'Leon Hamilton,' indeed! just as though I didn't know Enid Wilmer!

But she said nothing of this to Wayne. In the course of the next few days, she made certain astonishing discoveries. During the long daily naps prescribed for the invalid, she was in the habit of occupying herself with the local newspapers, gleaning items of interest to read to Wayne afterward. Among other matters, she was sure to glance over the list of arrivals, especially from the East; there was always the possibility of finding a name that would interest Wayne. What she found on this particular morning made her utter an exclamation halfway divided between astonishment and exultation. Then she grew thoughtful, and put on what Wayne would have called her "scheming face." Presently, she went in search of a woman who she was sure would be informed, and learned many items of interest concerning the pretty village only three miles away from them.

"It is a village of boarding-houses," said the lady, "they say that every house in the place

is open to travellers, and people seem to be charmed who go there; they stay on and on. I have often thought of trying it myself."

Two days thereafter, while Wayne went to drive with the doctor, Aunt Crete herself took a drive about which she said nothing whatever to Wayne. Following that trip came a period of dissatisfaction with her surroundings; nothing in the house, from the culinary department to the location of their rooms with reference to the prevailing winds, quite suited her. Finally came her plan. She had heard of rooms that had just been vacated in a lovely little town only three miles away. Everybody said it was a charming part of the country, and the doctor declared that he could not too highly approve of Aunt Crete's plan to remove there for a week or two, and give Wayne the benefit of real country air and food, preparatory to his long journey homeward. Wouldn't he like it?

Wayne would like anything in the world that this blessed auntie of his wished to do. Therefore it came to pass that before the father had been many days at home, his son was moved and settled in a comfortable house exactly opposite the one in which Enid Wilmer and her mother were boarding; and the two young people were as utterly ignorant of each other's nearness as though there was no such science as Telepathy in existence.

Enid, be it understood, had no sooner learned that the man whom she supposed dying was getting well, than a painful timidity overtook her. She would even have turned and fled back over the hundreds of miles she had come, but for the fact that her mother proved obstinate. Mrs. Wilmer had borne with every passing fancy of the girl's while she was in trouble, now it was her turn. It was pleasant there, and quiet; and they were as unknown to and as far from intruding upon Wayne Pierson — since she chose to have it so — as though they were three hundred miles away from him instead of three; and there was no good reason why they should not wait there for the father, as had been planned. She could journey without him when it was necessary, but when it was not, why — and she held her ground. So they waited.

They went, one evening, mother and daughter, to the little mission chapel, just around the corner from them, to the prayer-meeting. They had made the acquaintance of the home missionary, who was doing faithful work in a discouraging corner of the vineyard, and were minded to help him if they could. And to that same prayer-meeting went Aunt Crete and her nephew. She, because it was as natural for her to gravitate toward an open chapel door and a summoning bell as it was to breathe, and

he, because he knew that for the first time in his life he should, within church walls, meet his kindred, brothers in Christ, and he thirsted for their company.

Enid and her mother came in late, having mistaken the hour, and sat near the door; and Enid studied the back of Wayne's head and wondered at the unaccountable likeness to the back of another head that she knew. And then, suddenly, all her pulses went to throbbing, and the room seemed to whirl in a strange dance before her; the man with the familiar head had risen and was praying, and his voice, oh, *his voice!* She looked at her mother; was she going insane after all? But her mother smiled on her — albeit there were tears in her eyes — and whispered as she bowed her head: —

"It is he, darling; just himself, and not his spirit."

They walked home together, of course. They met decorously after the meeting, as people should who are tourists and meet by accident before others in a strange town.

"Is it possible!" was all Enid said as she took his outstretched hand, and he said, "Did you come down in one of those golden chariots that I saw at sunset?"

On the way home they talked the merest commonplaces. Yes, they were staying here,

she and her mother, waiting for papa who was detained by some tiresome mine business.

Oh, yes, he was gaining very rapidly now; hoped to be able to go home in a few days. Mrs. Wilmer, being introduced to Aunt Crete, walked discreetly by her side talking commonplaces, and aware that she was near enough to hear anything that the other two might be saying. They reached Mrs. Wilmer's house first, and both accepted her playful invitation to stop and rest before they crossed the street.

Then, once in the pleasant parlor, a little removed from the two elder ladies, Wayne, who had determined to have no more misunderstandings in life for lack of straightforward speech, went directly to the point.

"Enid, I am not going to feign ignorance or wait for confidences. I have heard through my people at home of your approaching marriage; and I want to tell you at once that my desire for your future happiness is sincere, and that I intend to be as true a brother, not only to you but to him, as God will help me to become."

He never forgot the look in her great brown eyes that seemed to widen and deepen under his rapid speech, nor the words in which she answered him: —

"They told me you were quite well, mentally; but I am constrained to think that they are mistaken, and that you are a lunatic. I

have always wanted a brother, but not at the expense of being married. If you fancy me engaged to — to *any one*, there was never a more ridiculous mistake."

He had been sitting just opposite to her; he suddenly drew his chair nearer, and his voice dropped lower. Aunt Crete could not catch even a syllable. She and Mrs. Wilmer talked and *talked*. Aunt Crete went over, in what detail she could, the story of the peril, and the rescue, and the battle waged so fiercely and so long with death. She had a fascinated listener and told her story well; but most stories reach a period at last. Hers did. The story being told in chapters, over in the other corner of the room, by two authors, seemed to have no periods: it went on and on!

Aunt Crete tried to talk commonplaces to Mrs. Wilmer, and failed; and looked surreptitiously at her watch. Her eyes served her better than her ears. Over in the corner she saw Wayne take from the pocket of his private diary a little wizened specimen of a worn-out rosebud and show it to Enid as though it were a diamond.

"Pity's sake!" she said to herself; "and the vase almost under his nose is full of roses that were gathered to-day."

Suddenly she looked at the waiting mother.

"There's more than one kind of wilderness,"

she said. "That boy of mine has been floundering through some of them for years. There is one verse in the Bible that if I've thought of once I suppose I have a hundred times in the last few weeks: 'And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee, these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments or not.' Wayne has been tried, and he's kept the Lord waiting a good while; but you know there's that other verse: 'The Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, springing forth into valleys and hills.' I do hope the boy has got out of the terrible wilderness, and where he can cultivate a few roses at last; but he won't enjoy it — not a *mite*, unless he can have Eve with him."

The mother smiled, a high, sweet, self-abnegating smile, such as only mothers can, as she said: —

"I have a few treasures so precious that I dare not even try to care for them myself; I have to trust them entirely to the Lord's keeping."

A few days thereafter, Wayne received a letter from his father, one paragraph of which ran thus: —

"By the way, my boy, I do not suppose it

will make any difference to you, but I want to set right a piece of news that I gave you. Leon, in writing to his mother about his approaching marriage, was careless, as he generally is, and gave her an utterly wrong impression. The chosen one is the daughter of an old schoolmate, but it appears not *the* schoolmate that his mother had supposed and hoped for. It is a Miss Gatewood, I believe; a very charming young woman if we may take Leon's judgment, and we can only hope for the best."

Having reached as far as this, Wayne dropped the letter, bowed his head in his hands, and lost himself in a maze of thought. Suppose his father had not misunderstood, and he had not been led to fight that battle with his enemy, and come off victor, and understand God as he never had before, what then? But why "suppose" anything? Did not God know?

"Aunt Crete," he said, when he went to carry her the letter, "you are always finding Bible verses that are not in other people's Bibles; do you know, I have found one now that I cannot think has been even in yours all these years. Aunt Crete, I have *lived* it, and I know it is true. Listen: 'I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; in paths that they know not will I lead them. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight.'"

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